



CONNECT

**Community Organizing
Navigating Service Delivery
Nurturing Early Childhood Teams**

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Community **O**rganizing, **N**avigating Service Delivery, and **N**urturing Early Childhood Teams

This proposal was prepared by the Early Childhood Learning Collaborative Systems and Resources Workgroup and submitted to the Children's Trust of Alachua County in August 2026.

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Introduction

Too many young children in Alachua County with developmental delays are identified late, experience fragmented services, or never receive the supports they need to thrive in early learning settings. Early childhood programs, therapists, and families often work in parallel rather than as coordinated teams, limiting opportunities for timely intervention during the most critical years of young children's learning and development.

Project CONNECT addresses this challenge by creating a community-informed model for coordinated developmental screening, referral, and evaluation; transdisciplinary service delivery; practice-based coaching for educators to provide individualized learning supports for children with special needs; and supports for strengthening family members' capacity to advocate for their child and support their child's learning and development. Rather than building another siloed initiative, CONNECT is designed to build capacity within existing early childhood systems so that children's individual educational support needs are identified early and they receive effective supports and greater access to high-quality, inclusive early learning environments, regardless of their eligibility for early intervention or early childhood special education services.

As we describe in this proposal, over three years, we will develop, implement, and refine protocols for implementation, measures for assessing implementation using a results-based accountability framework of efforts (i.e., How much? How well?), and effects (i.e., Are our efforts making a difference?), and recommend strategies for sustaining and scaling this initiative within our community. This proposal aligns with the *Children's Trust of Alachua County's Strategic Plan* for the 2027 to 2030 fiscal years.

Indicators – Responding to Community Needs

Based on the 2024 U.S. Census Bureau (2024) estimates, approximately 13,400 children under the age of 5 live in Alachua County. Data about the number of children under age 5 who are eligible to receive early intervention or special education and related services (e.g., speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral supports) in Alachua County are not readily available, statewide data suggest approximately 3.6% of children in Florida were eligible to receive these services in 2024 (Florida Department of Education, 2026; Florida Early Steps, 2026; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023) estimates that approximately 1 in 6 (~16%) children will be identified as having a developmental disability or delay that results in special needs at some point in their childhood, although many are not identified early. Using these figures, there is an apparent gap between the true number of children with special needs in Florida—and thus in Alachua County—and those found eligible to receive early intervention or special education and related

services, which are provided to children with the most significant developmental delays. Children who are not found eligible for these services are likely to benefit from individualized educational supports and services, particularly in the first five years of life, when learning and development are most malleable.

Similarly, available state and local data suggest young children and their families need additional supports and services to thrive. The Kindergarten Readiness rate in Alachua County, as assessed by the Star Early Literacy assessment administered to kindergarten students within the first 30 days of the school year, indicates that in 2025, only 44% of children were “ready for kindergarten” (Florida Department of Education, 2026). While a recent community needs assessment, which used a combination of survey and focus group data to understand better and make recommendations about promoting literacy within Alachua County, called for increased access to “speech and language screenings and specialized intervention for children at risk,” and enhanced coordination of community efforts to increase the number of children and families who have access to developmental screenings and if found eligible early intervention services (Bratsch-Hines et al., 2025, p.109).

CONNECT was developed through a year-long community-led workgroup focused on identifying high-leverage interventions for young children and their families. This workgroup was convened and facilitated by the Children’s Trust of Alachua County. The proposed CONNECT project responds to these data-informed indicators of need within our community, the priorities shared by community partners engaged in the workgroup, and the goals and indicators specified in the *Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s Strategic Plan* for fiscal years 2027 to 2030. Specifically, we aim to address the following:

- a. Goal 1 Focus Area—Children and Youth with Special Needs
 - i. Indicator—Enhance efforts in Alachua focused on serving children with special needs. The CTAC aims to better understand community needs in this area and to convene partners to address them.
- b. Goal 2 Focus Area—Early Learning
 - i. Indicator—Kindergarten readiness, VPK participation

Rationale – Why This Project Matters

CONNECT is designed to build capacity within early learning systems and community-based providers in Alachua County to offer high-quality supports and services to children with suspected or identified special needs.

This priority is well aligned with the Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s Strategic Plan Goal 1 Focus Area—Children and Youth with Special Needs and Goal 2 Focus Area – Early Learning, which is designed to address the following priorities within our community:

- ii. Access to specialized supports and resources
- iii. Barriers related to limited providers, cost, and service delivery locations
- iv. Proper and consistent support that fosters independence and quality of life
- v. Children enter kindergarten ready to succeed

Throughout our participation in the Early Childhood Learning Collaborative System Coordination and Resource Workgroup, convened by the Children's Trust of Alachua County, ensuring that children, families, and providers have access to systems and providers that will help them to individualize educational and developmental supports regardless of the child's formal diagnosis or eligibility for special education services under IDEA has remained a priority. A foundational element in understanding and addressing access, within the workgroup, was clarifying the process by which children are found eligible for services.

What are pathways to eligibility for early intervention and special education services?

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), children and families have legal protections for accessing eligibility evaluations (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, 2024). This formal evaluation assesses the child's academic, physical, and functional abilities. For children from birth to age 3, Early Steps, the state of Florida's early intervention program, has 45 days from the initial referral to complete an evaluation and, if appropriate, hold an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meeting. For children ages 3 to 5, evaluations must be conducted within 60 calendar days from the initial referral, and for children found eligible, a meeting is held to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The entity that evaluates preschool-age children varies based on where the child is enrolled for other educational services and includes: the public school, Head Start grantee, or a provider identified by the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource System (FDLRS) Child Find if the child is not enrolled with the public school or Head Start. Within Alachua County, 68% of infants and toddlers and 97% of preschool-aged children are evaluated within the federally mandated timelines (Florida Department of Education, 2026; Florida Early Steps, 2026) – evaluation delays result in delayed services when children are determined eligible.

Although there are multiple pathways for eligibility evaluation, some families choose not to participate in the evaluation process. Furthermore, not all children who are evaluated are found eligible for services. Having a medical diagnosis does not automatically guarantee eligibility for special education services; the evaluation team must confirm that the impact of the disability is severe enough to warrant additional services. These factors contribute to the gap in the predicted number of children with special needs reported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the number who receive these services. While CONNECT is designed to enhance

screening and referrals for eligibility evaluations, it also includes strategies to ensure that children with special needs receive a high-quality educational experience with individualized supports, regardless of their participation in the eligibility process or determination.

How might CONNECT help children who are found eligible to receive access to specialized supports and resources in their natural settings?

Young children with disabilities and their families benefit from inclusion in everyday environments and receiving services in relevant contexts with people and materials that are part of their daily activities and routines (Bruder, 2010). Research consistently demonstrates that developmental outcomes improve when children receive intervention within the routines, relationships, and environments where they naturally learn and play (Snyder et al., 2017, 2026). For 62% of children ages 5 and under in Florida, across diverse racial and socio-economic strata, the natural environment includes school or center-based care (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). However, children with disabilities and their families continue to face significant barriers to accessing and participating in inclusive early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE] and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2023). To ensure children and families have access to services in natural environments, it is imperative to explore mechanisms to promote and sustain effective collaborative partnerships between related service providers (e.g., SLP, OT, PT, behavior support specialists) and early childhood program coaches, educators, and administrators. Consequently, the proposed initiative emphasizes embedded intervention rather than pull-out services whenever appropriate.

Early childhood programs benefit from professional learning supports, such as those proposed in CONNECT, that help them foster inclusive environments where children with disabilities can receive interventions within their natural environments (USDOE & USDHHS, 2023). A primary service provider or transdisciplinary service delivery model (Bell et al., 2010; Hutchison, 1978) is a promising approach for structuring partnerships across disciplines to support each child's full and meaningful engagement in daily activities and routines. In contrast to multi- or interdisciplinary approaches, in which services may be coordinated yet remain discipline-specific, the transdisciplinary approach views the child and family holistically. It prioritizes functional goals that support the child's engagement across home, school, and community settings. Early childhood professionals need initial and ongoing job-embedded professional learning opportunities to engage in this type of collaborative teaming with therapists and the child's family.

How might CONNECT help children who are not found eligible or who do not participate in an evaluation to receive access to individualized supports and resources in their natural settings?

Although IDEA guarantees evaluation and intervention services for eligible children, many families experience delays in referral, an incomplete understanding of the process, or difficulty coordinating services across agencies. In addition, many children who would benefit from

individualized supports are either not eligible for IDEA services or never complete the evaluation process. Consequently, early childhood programs need systems that support all children—not only those with formal eligibility determinations.

CONNECT will use a multi-tiered approach to build capacity within early learning systems and among the staff of early childhood programs in Alachua County to meet the needs of children aged 5 and under with or at risk for disabilities or delays, and their families. CONNECT will help early childhood programs use their screening data more systematically to identify children at risk and provide individualized supports to the child, family, and classroom staff immediately, regardless of formal diagnosis or IDEA eligibility. Early childhood program staff, through their engagement with the CONNECT and related service providers, will enhance their knowledge, dispositions, and skills to design more inclusive environments and facilitate more equitable access to learning opportunities in everyday classroom activities and routines. When educators learn practices to individualize for children with identified disabilities, they can generalize those practices to meet the needs of all children in their classroom who may need additional support (Snyder et al., 2025).

Project Objectives & Strategies

CONNECT has three primary objectives aligned with The Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s Strategic Plan: Goal 1 - Children and Youth with Special Needs and Goal 2 – Early Learning. Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s strategies associated with these goals are shown alongside the project objectives in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Aligning Project Objectives with CTAC Goals and Priorities

Project Objectives	CTAC Goal 1 Children and Youth with Special Needs Strategies	CTAC Goal 2 Early Learning Strategies
1. Develop and implement a transdisciplinary teaming that strengthens developmental screening, referral, evaluation, and identification of children with developmental delays and coordinated intervention and embedded learning supports across early childhood programs	• Convene partners, professionals (local and beyond), and parents to determine opportunities to add, expand or enhance programs • Evaluate supports and resources available for children with special needs • Introduce additional services, programming,	• Improve access to early childhood care and education

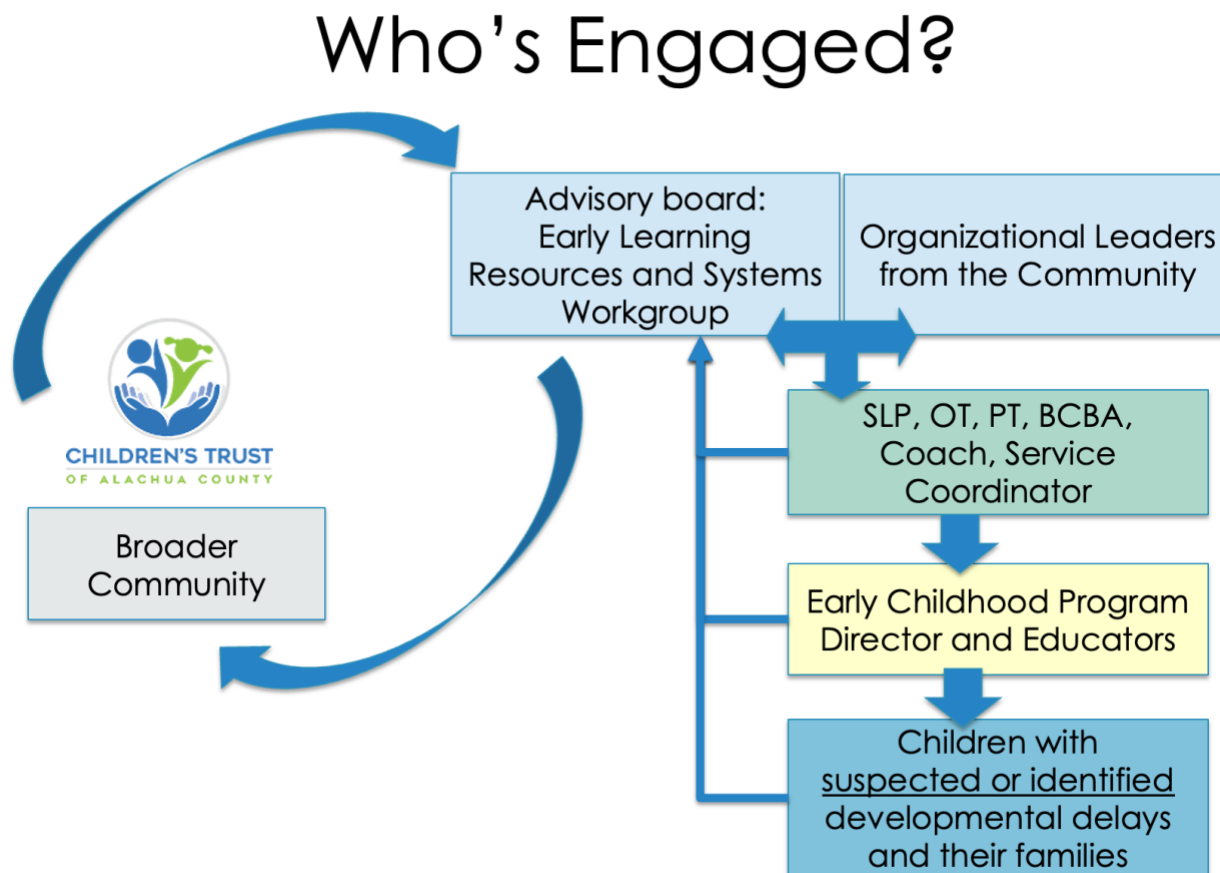
	and supports for children with special needs	
2. Increase the capacity of early childhood directors and educators to provide individualized, embedded learning supports for children within inclusive classrooms and everyday routines	• Introduce additional services, programming, and supports for children with special needs	• Improve access to early childhood care and education • Strengthen and enhance quality of early childhood care and education
3. Strengthen partnerships among families, educators, therapists, and early childhood service providers within our community to improve continuity and promote positive outcomes	• Involve parents/ caregivers to determine needs and solutions • Evaluate supports and resources available for children with special needs and their families	• Improve access to early childhood care and education

Key Partnerships & Individuals Served

CONNECT will expand collaboration and extend the capacity of our community's early learning systems and programs to address the needs of young children with suspected or identified disabilities and their families. Figure 1 illustrates the roles of individuals who will be engaged in this work and how communication will flow between these groups. Figure 2 illustrates the impact of this work in terms of the estimated number of individuals served by CONNECT each year.

Key partners in this work will include:

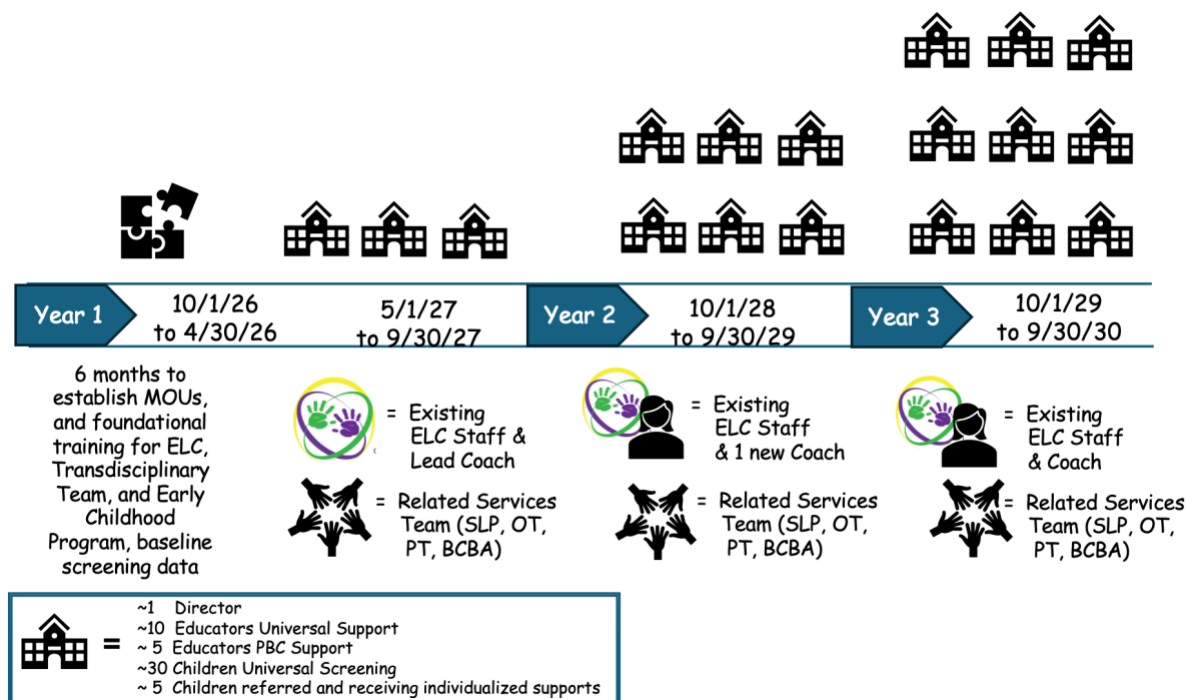
- **Children's Trust of Alachua County** – The Children's Trust of Alachua County will help facilitate engagement with the broader community through the Early Childhood Learning Collaborative and other public community-based forums.
- **Advisory Board** - The Advisory Board will include the Leaders of the Early Learning Collaborative Resources and Systems Workgroup. This advisory team will provide access to evidence-based professional learning materials and supports as well as program implementation and evaluation expertise from faculty in related disciplines at the University of Florida's Colleges of Education, and Public Health and Health Professions.

Figure 1.*Roles and Communication Among Key Partners*

- Organizational Leaders from Community** - The Advisory Board will work closely with Organizational Leaders from community partners that employ personnel engaged in CONNECT as members of the transdisciplinary team or recipients of the team's services. Organizational Leaders will sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) committing staff time and effort to implement the project with fidelity, as well as data-sharing agreements. The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County will play a key role in CONNECT, building on systems they already have in place for assisting providers with screening through the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), technical assistance for supporting programs to develop inclusive environments, and ongoing job-embedded practice-based coaching for early care and education directors and educators. The Advisory Board, Children's Trust of Alachua County, and Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County will collaboratively identify community partners, including the related

service providers and the early childhood programs. The Advisory Team will work closely with the Early Learning Coalition, Episcopal Children's Services, which is the local Head Start grantee, and the Alachua County Public Schools to identify opportunities for these community leaders in the early childhood sector to be engaged with CONNECT and later serve as model demonstration centers for others to support future sustainability and scale-up initiatives.

- **Transdisciplinary Team** - Members of the transdisciplinary team will include related service providers (i.e., speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, board-certified behavior analyst), a coach, and a service coordinator. Individuals on this team, with the support of their supervisor as outlined in the MOU, will commit to participating in initial and ongoing support to implement practices associated with transdisciplinary teaming or a primary service provider approach, practice-based coaching, and embedded learning supports. The Supervisor must commit to participating in the Organizational Leaders Team and to sharing data with the Advisory Team, as outlined in the MOU.
- **Early Childhood Program Director and Educators** – Three new early childhood programs will be supported each year of the proposed three-year project. There are many early childhood programs and skilled individuals who could fulfill these roles, including many who have been engaged with the Early Childhood Learning Collaborative since its inception. However, as we work toward initial piloting with select implementation sites, we will collaborate with the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County to consider (a) foundational indicators of program safety and quality, (b) demonstration of a commitment to serving children with identified disabilities, (c) stable leadership, and diversity in terms of program size and structure.
- **Children and Families** - Children with suspected or identified disabilities and their families will be identified in collaboration with early childhood programs, as the transdisciplinary team supports the collection and use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and other screening data in data-informed decision-making processes. Children will receive individualized embedded learning supports within their classrooms. Families will receive additional information and supports related to universal screenings; eligibility evaluations; embedded learning supports that can be used across home, school, and community settings; and advocating for their child when they suspect additional supports are needed in the early learning environment and as the child transitions into the K-12 system.

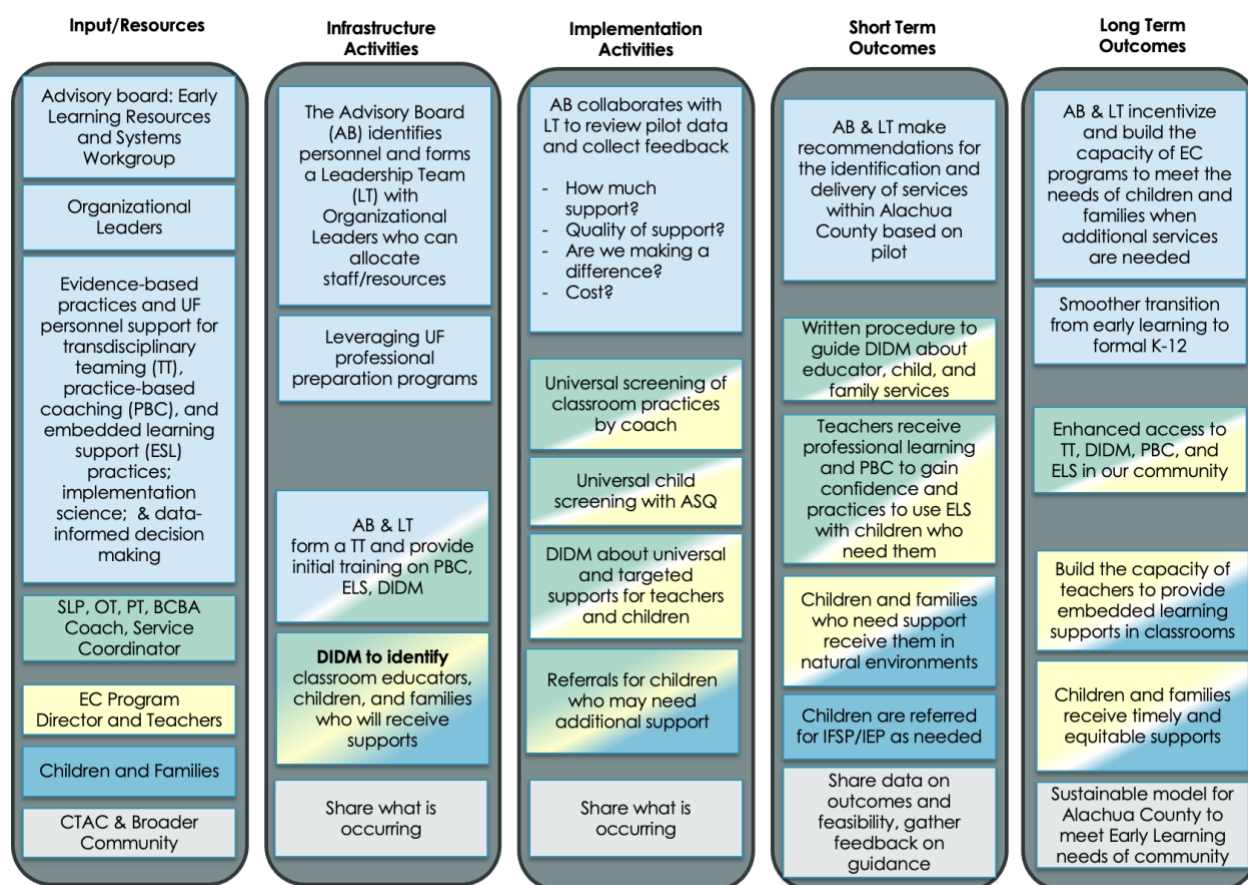
Figure 2.*Estimated Impact of CONNECT Each Year*

Note. At the conclusion of Year 3, we estimate that we will have served approximately 9 directors, 90 educators at the universal level (including 45 with intensive coaching support), and 270 children at the universal screening level (including 45 receiving individualized learning supports and referrals for additional eligibility evaluations as needed).

Implementation Plan

The logic model in Figure 3 is color-coded to align with the roles shown in Figure 1. The logic model shows the overarching approach for the three-year project. The content can be read chronologically from left to right and according to CONNECT leadership structures from the advisory at the top to recipients of services at the bottom, recognizing that intentional data-informed feedback loops as depicted in Figure 1 will help to ensure services are not top-down, but rather developed through a collaborative, participatory research model, with iterative cycles of program development, implementation, evaluation, and refinement or what is often referred to in the implementation sciences literature as prepare, plan, do, study, act. It is also important to note that the role of the advisor and leadership, although prominent on the left side of the model, fades over time as capacity is built within the system. Early adopters who participate in the pilot work will have repeated opportunities across multiple years and programs to gain fluency with the processes, so they can sustain and scale up this work in the future.

Figure 3.

CONNECT Logic Model

Below is a description of each component of the logic model.

- Inputs/Resources** - Establish the foundational resources needed for implementation, including leadership, advisory groups, evidence-based practices, multidisciplinary professionals, educators, children and families, and community partners. These resources provide the expertise, staffing, and organizational support required to implement the initiative.
- Infrastructure Activities** - Develop a Leadership Team composed of the organizational Advisory Board and Organizational Leaders; leverage university partnerships; provide professional learning supports for implementation teams; identify educators, children, and families who will receive intervention supports; and establish communication processes among stakeholders.
- Implementation Activities** - Deliver and monitor intervention activities, including conducting classroom and child screenings, providing coaching and targeted supports,

referring children for additional services when needed, reviewing pilot data, and continuously sharing implementation progress.

- **Short Term Outcomes** - Achieve immediate improvements through data-informed decision making, development of service delivery procedures, increased educator knowledge and confidence, provision of supports for children and their families in natural learning environments, screening and referrals for specialized services, and ongoing evaluation of pilot outcomes.
- **Long-term Outcomes** - Strengthen the early childhood system by expanding program capacity, improving transitions to kindergarten, increasing access to evidence-based supports, building educator capacity, ensuring timely and equitable services for children and families, and creating a sustainable model for meeting community early learning needs.

Table 2 further details the timeline and deliverables for key implementation activities in Year 1. Year 1 is a 6-month start-up period to develop implementation materials, receive approval from the University of Florida Internal Review Board (IRB) for the evaluation, establish a memorandum of understanding (MOU) among partners, and develop implementation materials. The latter half of the first year will be focused on installation and initial implementation with three community-based early childhood programs.

Years 2 and 3 are 12 months and align with the October 1 fiscal year. The activities and timelines for Year 1 are shown below. Activities for Years 2 and 3 will be similar to Year 1: Part 2, with three additional early learning programs added each year, along with sustainability supports for those added in previous years. Figure 2 above provides another format for examining the relative impact of CONNECT across the proposed three-year (36-month) scope of work.

Table 2.

CONNECT Timeline

Completion	Activity	Deliverables
Year 1: Part 1	6 months start up	
10/1/2026	Project kick-off	Signed contract
11/30/2026	Establish Advisory Board (existing workgroup and organizational leaders from key partner agencies, parents/caregivers, practitioners)	Advisory member roster, Schedule for ongoing engagement
12/31/2026	Collaborate with the Children's Trust of Alachua County to conduct a crosswalk of organizations in Alachua County that provide supports and resources for serving children with special needs in ECE settings	Asset map of supports and resources available for children with special needs, including a plan for dissemination
12/31/2026	Develop contextually relevant, evidence-based materials for the initial professional learning and documentation of project CONNECT Draft MOU documents and criteria for program selection	Materials and electronic forms for documenting efforts and effects MOUs documents
1/30/2027	Engage in materials and measure review with Advisory Board to ensure they are socially valid for the intended contexts and review propose MOU language to recruit related service providers and early childhood programs	Social validity data affirming contextual relevance of materials
1/30/2027	Recruit and select related service providers and three early childhood programs	Criteria for selection
2/28/2027	Establish memorandum of understanding with organizational leaders who supervise related service providers and early childhood programs to facilitate staff time dedicated to the project and data sharing agreements	Signed MOUs with participating organizations
3/30/2027	Foundational implementers professional learning with Transdisciplinary Team composed of Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County staff (Child Development Coordinator, Transformative Professional Development Coordinator, Lead Transformative Professional Development Coach) and related service providers (speech language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, board certified behavior analyst).	Effort data, related to the workforce capacity building on evidence-based practices related to teaming, data-informed decision making, practice-based coaching, and embedded learning across home, school, and community settings.

Completion	Activity	Deliverables
Year 1: Part 2	6 month initial installation and implementation	
April to Sept.	Monthly Transdisciplinary Leadership Team meetings to discuss early childhood program and child supports	Implementation materials, fidelity checklist, participant evaluations
4/30/2027	Orientation for the early childhood program directors and staff with the inter-agency Transdisciplinary Leadership Team Complete program strengths and needs assessment	Effort data, related to the workforce capacity building focused teaming, data-informed decision making, and embedded learning across home, school, and community settings
4/30/2027	Transdisciplinary Team collaborates with each early childhood program, with guidance from the Advisory Board, to develop a written plan and timeline for (a) collecting program-wide universal screening data, (b) summarizing screening data, (c) making data-informed decisions about referral, evaluation, and individualized supports, and (d) implementing and evaluating coordinated, transdisciplinary supports	Written evaluation plan and timeline for each early childhood program
4/30/2027	Baseline family survey about access to information and ability to communicate with program about their child's development	Family survey baseline
5/30/2027	Develop and disseminate information for families about the importances of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and the early childhood program's participation in the project	Informational materials for families
5/30/2027	Universal classroom practices screening and program strengths and needs assessment	Program and classroom level strengths and needs assessment
5/30/2027	Universal screening using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire for all children receiving school readiness vouchers within the three early childhood programs; refer children for additional eligibility evaluations as appropriate; select focal children for additional embedded learning supports	Protocols for making data-informed decisions about which children may need additional supports

Completion	Activity	Deliverables
6/15/2027	Transdisciplinary team, collaborates with early childhood program and families to evaluates skills of focal children within ongoing activities and routines. Pilot the Child Outcome Summary (COS) Process for focal children. (Note: COS requires 6-months of intervention support to assess outcomes)	Baseline observational child assessments Baseline COS data
6/30/2027	Establish target skills for focal children, with guidance from transdisciplinary team Establish PBC goals with practitioners around implementing coordinated, individualized learning supports on targeted skills for children who have suspected or identified special needs	Written target skills Written PBC goal and action plan
July to Sept.	Early childhood program directors and educators receiving ongoing practice-based coaching (PBC) to support their implementation of inclusive practices and embedded learning supports. Monthly director supports, weekly educator supports, periodic direct services from related service providers as appropriate to the needs of individual children	PBC implementation fidelity data, educator practice implementation data, focal child target skill demonstration data Documentation of related service provider efforts
7/30/2027	<i>Pending funding for continued implementation begin the recruitment process for three new programs and a new Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County coach to support sustainability and scale-up</i>	<i>MOU with second cohort of three early childhood programs, hire coach with experience working in inclusive settings</i>
9/15/2027	Post-support universal classroom practices screening and program strengths and needs assessment. Post-support family survey Gather social validity data from transdisciplinary team, early childhood program, and families about their experience with CONNECT	Assess initial changes following installation and initial implementation of CONNET for programs, educators, and families Assess social validity of program
9/30/2027	Summarize Year 1 progress and identify opportunities to strengthen project implementation	Year 1 Report
12/30/2027	<i>6 month re-evaluation of COS data for focal children from the initial programs</i>	<i>COS outcomes</i>

Measured Results

The proposed project CONNECT measures are directly aligned with those of the Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s (CTAC) Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2027 to 2030, and that will provide information about the impacts of CONNECT on community programs, practitioners serving children birth to age 5 with special needs, children birth to age 5 with special needs, and their families. The proposed measures for CONNECT are presented with respect to the relevant goals, strategies, and measures described in the Strategic Plan.

Goal 1: Children and Youth with Special Needs

CTAC’s Goal 1 specifies three strategies to enhance access to quality programming for children and youth with special needs. Table 3 lists the proposed measures alongside the Children’s Trust of Alachua County strategies, measures, and timelines with which they are aligned.

Table 3.

Measures Results of CONNECT Aligned with CTAC Goal 1 Strategies and Measures

CTAC Strategy	CTAC Measure and Timeline	Project Measure
Evaluate supports and resources and resources available for children with special needs	Asset map of supports and resources available for children with special needs, develop dissemination/ awareness plan (2027)	In Year 1 (2027), we will collaborate with the Children’s Trust to generate and refine an asset map of early childhood learning supports and resources for children with or at-risk for developmental delays or disabilities and their families, including (a) professional development for practitioners; (b) referral, screening, and evaluation; (c) service delivery in ECE settings, and (d) family resources or supports. The asset map will be disseminated to the CONNECT Advisory Board, Leadership Team, and the broader community through activities described in our implementation plan and public-facing partner websites.
Involve and convene partners, professionals, and parents: Convene stakeholders	Convene stakeholders to assess community needs and develop a plan to address them (2027).	The Early Learning Resources and Systems workgroup is composed of community leaders and subject matter experts who have collaborated to identify the needs stated in the current proposal and develop the proposal and implementation plan for CONNECT.

CTAC Strategy	CTAC Measure and Timeline	Project Measure
		In Year 1 (2027), we will engage additional stakeholders (organizational leaders from key partner agencies, parents/caregivers, practitioners) to serve on the Leadership Team composed of Advisory Board members and Organizational Leaders. In Year 1 (2027), we will develop a written plan and guidance procedures for (a) collecting program-wide universal screening data, (b) summarizing screening data, (c) making data-informed decisions about referral, evaluation, and individualized supports, and (d) implementing and evaluating coordinated, transdisciplinary supports. In Year 1 (2027), we will form an inter-agency Transdisciplinary Leadership Team that includes select members of the Advisory Board, a Service Coordinator, a Coach from the Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County, a Speech-Language Pathologist, an Occupational Therapist, a Physical Therapist, and a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Within each pilot site, we will form implementation teams that include the Transdisciplinary Leadership Team and the ECE Center Director. Educators and families receiving supports will also participate in implementation team meetings focused on individual classroom and child supports. We propose to identify 3 implementation sites in Year 1 (2027), 3 additional sites in Year 2 (2028), and 3 additional sites in Year 3 (2029), for a total of 9 implementation sites.
Introduce additional	200 children with special needs and	Universal screening services using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ1) for all children

1 All children birth to 5 who participate in the School Readiness Program must receive an annual developmental screening. The purpose of a developmental screening is to capture a snapshot of a child's development at a single point in time. When screenings are given regularly, they provide information for tracking a child's developmental progress. Screening helps identify children who may not meet the milestones appropriate for their age and might

CTAC Strategy	CTAC Measure and Timeline	Project Measure
services, programming, and supports	their families are served (no date specified)	receiving school readiness vouchers within implementation sites (Year 1 = 90 children; Year 2 = 180 children; Year 3 = 270 children) Referral and evaluation support (provided by the ELC or partner organizations (e.g., FDLRS, Early Steps, Help Me Grow, etc.) for an estimated 16% of children and their families based on universal screening. This estimate is based on the CDC guidance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Coordinated, individualized learning supports on targeted skills for children who have special needs as determined by universal screening and benchmarks specified in the data informed decision making plan or who have confirmed special needs through formal early intervention/early childhood special education referral and evaluation processes (Year 1 = 15 children, Year 2 = 30 children; Year 3 = 45 children). This estimate is based on the CDC guidance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023) Universal family survey, conducted with families in each implementation site, to gather information about the extent to which families can access support and communicate with the program about their child's development. We will send the survey to families of participating implementation site programs. We estimate approximately ~15% of the 30 children served in each program will have a family member who completes the survey (Year 1 = 15, Year 2 = 30, Year 3 = 45).

benefit from further assessment and follow-up. The Ages & Stages Questionnaires®, Third Edition (ASQ®-3) is the developmental screening tool used in the School Readiness Program. The screening tool is easy to use, family friendly and creates the snapshot needed to catch developmental delays and celebrate milestones. Parents, childcare providers and early learning coalitions can complete the screening tool. Screening results are shared with parents.

Goal 2: Early Learning

Goal 2 specifies two strategies to achieve the Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s objective of ensuring children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. These strategies focus on (a) enhancing access to early care and education and (b) strengthening and enhancing the quality of early care and education. CONNECT proposes to enhance access to early care and education for children with special needs and strengthen the quality of early care and education by building capacity to provide individualized learning supports for these children. We have proposed measures aligned with those identified in the Children’s Trust of Alachua County’s Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2027 to 2030. Table 4 lists the proposed measures alongside the CTAC strategies, measures, and timelines with which they are aligned.

Table 4.

Measures Results of CONNECT Aligned with CTAC Goal 2 Strategies and Measures

CTAC Strategy	CTAC Measure and Timeline	Project Measure
Improve access to early care and education	165 children aged 0-5 provided with free or reduced cost early learning (e.g., through tuition scholarships, summer programming) opportunities (Timeline Not Specified) Children’s learning gains outpace children not participating in programming (Target = 70%; Timeline Not Specified)	Children 0-5 who are identified as having special needs through the process described in the data-informed decision making process or through formal referral and evaluation processes will be provided with free or reduced cost early learning services through Florida’s School Readiness program (Year 1 = 15; Year 2 = 30; Year 3 = 45). 70% of children receiving individualized supports on targeted skills for 6 months or more, will 2 in one or more of the following areas (1) Positive Social-Emotional Skills, (2) Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills, or (3) Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs. <u>Child Outcome</u>

CTAC Strategy	CTAC Measure and Timeline	Project Measure
		<u>Summary (COS) Process</u>³ in one or more of the following areas (1) Positive Social-Emotional Skills, (2) Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills, or (3) Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs. 70% of children receiving individualized supports will demonstrate progress on identified target skills which are observable, measurable, proximal skills aligned with the Florida Early Learning and Development Standards.
Strengthen and enhance quality of early childhood care and education	Childcare professionals strengthen their programming (e.g., through accreditation, staff professional development initiatives, leadership coaching; Target = 80%; Timeline not specified)	Interagency Transdisciplinary Leadership Team comprised of 1 Service Coordinator, 1 Coach, 1 Speech-Language Pathologist, 1 Occupational Therapist, 1 Physical Therapist, and 1 Board-Certified Behavior Analyst complete professional learning experiences focused on transdisciplinary teaming and individualizing learning supports for children with special needs EC educators receive Practice-Based Coaching focused on

³ The Child Outcomes Summary (COS) is a team decision-making process used by early intervention and preschool special education programs to measure functional skills across settings (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, 2022). It evaluates three key areas: (1) Positive social-emotional skills, (2) Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills, (3) Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs. A team of practitioners, families, and caregivers uses a 7-point rating scale to document progress from a child's initial entry into the program to their exit. The scale measures how closely a child's skills match age-expected behaviors and helps track developmental growth. These are the three child outcomes areas measured by the Office of Special Education to monitor the effectiveness of early intervention and early childhood special education programs nationwide. The COS process is used by the state of Florida to report the percentage of children of children receiving early intervention or early childhood special education services who demonstrate improvements in each of the three outcome areas monitored by the Office of Special Education Programs.

CTAC Strategy	CTAC Measure and Timeline	Project Measure
		providing embedded learning supports for children with special needs and partnering with families to support children's development and learning across home, school, and community settings 75% of educators increase their implementation of effective practices focused on individualized learning supports for children with special needs, as measured by the CLASS 2nd Edition and a project-developed implementation checklist aligned with the CLASS 2nd Edition and published measures of classroom quality and inclusive teaching practices. 75% of educators and the teams that support them will increase their use of transdisciplinary teaming practices as measured by program strengths and needs assessment. 75% of educators increase their use of practices to partner with families to support the learning and development of children with special needs as measured by pre- and post-implementation self-assessments for practitioners and family supports survey.

In summary, we will evaluate the efficacy of CONNECT in terms of efforts (How much? How well?) and effects (Are our efforts making a difference? Is anyone better off?), and produce the following deliverables:

Project Level

- Annual reports will be submitted each year, outlining the project efforts and effects, and detailing plans to address challenges or strengthen implementation
- A written plan for sustainability, including cost projections based on the three-year pilot

Systems Level

- Asset map, MOUs for facilitating collaboration among community organizations, an implementation plan, and materials for implementation and evaluation of transdisciplinary teaming practices

Early Childhood Program Level

- Within each of the 9 pilot sites, we will form implementation teams that include the Transdisciplinary Leadership Team and the Center Director, and collect data on implementation fidelity and program-level strengths and needs

Educator Level

- ~ 90 educators who have received universal professional learning supports
- ~ 45 educators who have received individualized practice-based coaching (PBC) support
- 75% of educators receiving PBC will demonstrate growth in their implementation of effective practices

Child and Family Level

- Assets to communicate with families about the importance of screening and how to be engaged in requesting an evaluation/service when needed for their child
- ~ 270 children screened
- ~ 45 children receive individual support
- 70% children receiving individualized supports will demonstrate growth

Budget and Budget Justification

The Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County (ELC-AC) is the proposed grantee for implementing CONNECT and contracting with community-based related service providers. The Anita Zucker Center for Excellence at the University of Florida, in collaboration with faculty from the College of Public Health and Health Professionals, will develop the CONNECT materials,

provide technical assistance to support implementation fidelity, conduct the evaluation, and complete reporting activities. Below is an estimate of the total annual cost, along with a brief description of the activities. As shown in Table 5, over 3 years (36 months), the total cost of implementing and evaluating the project is \$450,676. Personnel costs associated with workforce development and capacity building are the primary expense. See Figure 2 for additional information about estimated impacts associated with the budget by year.

Table 5.

Cost of CONNECT Implementation and Evaluation

Fiscal Year & Duration	Total	Key Activities
Year 1 2026-2027 6 months installation (Oct to April start) 6 months initial implementation (May to Sept)	\$107,270	Develop implementation materials, sign MOU with therapists, orientation and foundational professional learning experiences for ELC-AC (service coordinator, transformative professional development coordinator, lead practice-based coaching coach) and therapist (speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, board certified behavior analyst) • Implementers Supported (N = 7): 1 ELC-AC Child Development Coordinator, 1 ELC-AC Transformative Professional Development Coordinator, 1 ELC-AC Coach, 1 speech-language pathologist, 1 occupational therapist, 1 physical therapist, 1 board certified behavior analyst Recruit 3 programs to receive ELC coaching and support in engage in ASQ screening, referral, evaluation; data-informed decision making about individualized supports; individualized supports for children with suspected or identified developmental delays • Implementers Supported (N = 7): See Year 1 • Estimates of Individuals Served (N = 123): 3 program directors, 30 educators, 90 children birth to age 5 and their families
Year 2 2028-2029 12 months (Oct 1 start)	\$163,612	Sustain programs from Year 2 and add 3 new programs. Hire and onboard a new ELC coach with specialized knowledge and skills for supporting programs around inclusive practices and embedded learning supports for children with suspected or identified developmental delays • Implementers Supported (N = 8): See Year 1, 1 new coach

Fiscal Year & Duration	Total	Key Activities
		Estimates of Individuals Served (N = 186): 6 program directors, 60 educators, 120 children birth to age 5 and their families
Year 3 2029-30 12 months (Oct 1 start)	\$179,794	Sustain programs from Years 2 and 3 and add 3 new programs. Identify sustainability and scale-up supports to extend the work beyond the CTAC pilot funds. - Implementers Supported (N = 8): See Year 3 - Estimates of Individuals Served (N = 369): 9 program directors, 90 educators, 270 children birth to age 5 and their families
3 Years (36 months)	\$450,676	Total Cost for Years 1 - 3

Sustainability and Scale Up

This pilot capitalizes on the strengths of the existing early learning systems in our Alachua County community and evidence-based resources available through a close partnership with the University of Florida. CONNECT will build the capacity of early childhood programs to identify, support, and include young children with suspected or identified developmental delays and disabilities while strengthening coordination across community systems. By the end of the project, the community will have the human and organizational infrastructure necessary to sustain and scale the initiative. Sustainability is built into the project through workforce development and organizational capacity building, implementation coaching, leadership engagement, shared protocols, and locally developed implementation resources. Rather than relying on ongoing external consultation, participating organizations will develop internal expertise to maintain implementation fidelity, onboard future staff, and expand the model to additional sites.

The long-term vision is that every young child in Alachua County with suspected or identified developmental concerns is identified early, connected quickly to appropriate services, and fully included in high-quality early learning environments. By aligning community partners around a shared implementation framework, CONNECT creates a sustainable system that strengthens organizational practices, supports early childhood educators and families, and improves outcomes for children.

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