Northeast Early Childhood Council (NECC)

2026 LOCAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT (LNA) • EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LISTENING TO FAMILIES. BUILDING SOLUTIONS TOGETHER.

What Northeast Connecticut Families Need to Thrive

In Brooklyn, Canterbury, Killingly, Plainfield, Putnam, Sterling & Thompson

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Families across our seven-town region are working hard to build healthy, stable lives. They also face rising costs, limited childcare options, stress, isolation, and difficulty finding the right support at the right time. The good news: Northeast Connecticut has committed families, schools, providers, and community partners ready to work together.

7	68,534	586	100+
TOWNS	RESIDENTS	2024 BIRTHS	COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Three priorities emerged



Why this matters

No single organization can solve these challenges alone. The findings give families, schools, towns, providers, employers, and policymakers a shared direction for action.

Source: NECC Local Needs Assessment, June 30, 2026.

A REGIONAL PICTURE GROUNDED IN DATA AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Who we heard from, and what they told us

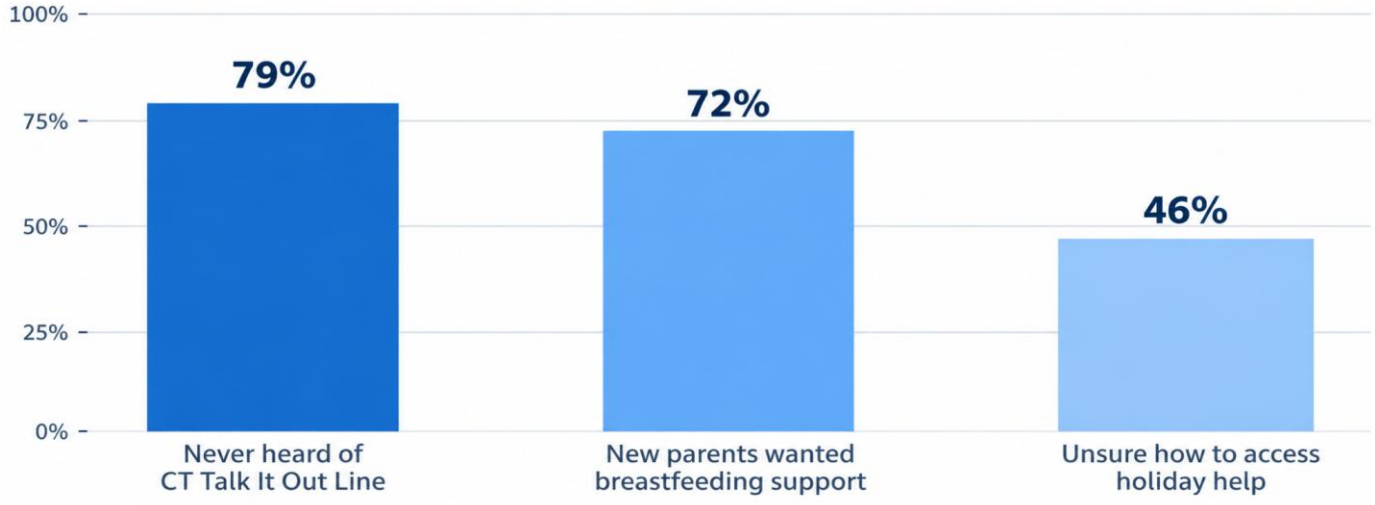
The NECC combined state and local data with local surveys, focus groups, Community Table conversations, and input from parents, educators, childcare providers, healthcare partners, and community organizations.

76 parents **New Parent Survey**	**98 responses** **Childcare and Early Education Needs Survey**	**70+ participants** Two Community Table focus groups

Families described overlapping pressures

Everyday affordability Housing, food, transportation, healthcare, and childcare costs strain family budgets, including those who may not qualify for financial assistance.	**Mental health and isolation** Anxiety, stress, and social isolation affect both adults and children, while long wait times and limited local specialized services make timely support difficult to access.
Hard-to-navigate systems Families may struggle to navigate transitions from Birth to Three to school-based services and understand what supports are available as children grow.	**Different needs by town** For childcare, larger towns face high demand; rural communities often have fewer nearby options for childcare and longer travel times to find quality care.

Awareness does not always lead to access



The central takeaway

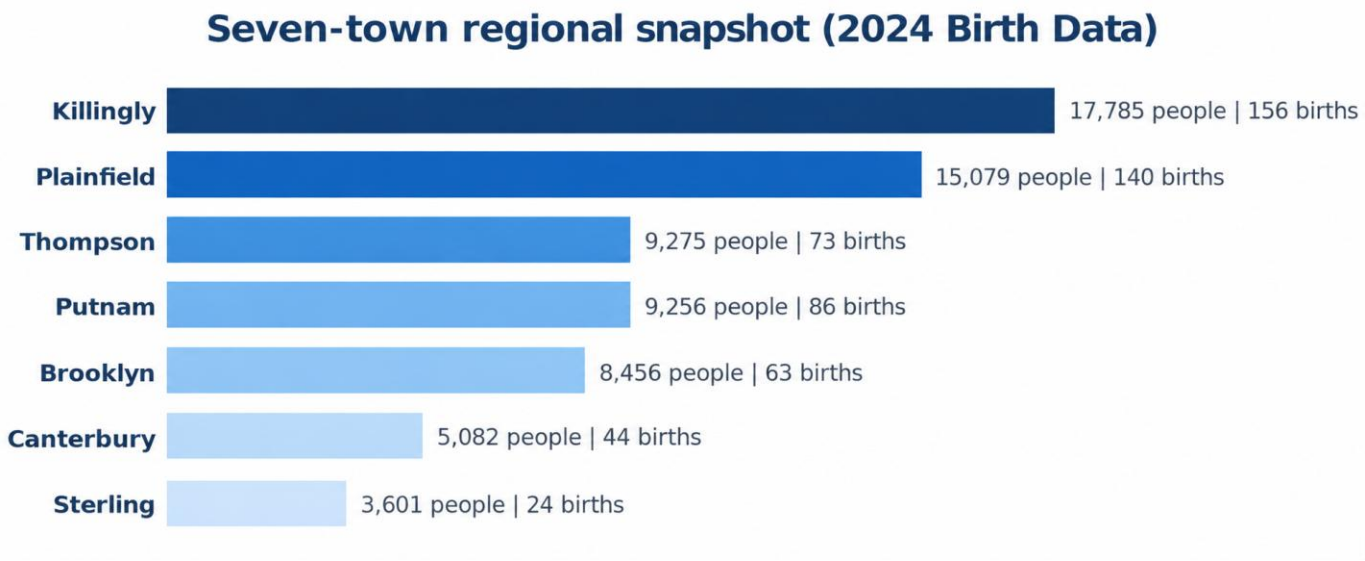
Many supports already exist, but families need earlier outreach, simpler information, trusted guides, and programs offered at times that work for working caregivers.

Source: NECC LNA surveys and community engagement findings. Percentages reflect the specific surveys cited in the full assessment.

THE REGION'S MOST URGENT SYSTEM CHALLENGE

Families need quality care they can find, afford & use

Childcare affects whether parents can work, whether children can access early learning, and whether local employers can recruit and retain staff. Families and providers described a system under pressure from both sides.



Where the gaps are greatest

Infants & toddlers Too few openings and long waitlists	**Working schedules** Need for full-day, wraparound, summer, and non-traditional hours	**Diverse needs** Limited inclusive care for developmental, behavioral, and medical needs

Why supply cannot keep up

Workforce shortage Programs may have classroom space but not enough qualified staff to provide care.	**Provider cost pressure** Wages, food, insurance, and operating costs rise while tuition must remain affordable.	**The missing middle** Some families earn too much for assistance but too little for market-rate care.

Investment priorities

EXPAND CARE	Increase infant, toddler, full-day, extended-hour, and wraparound options.
INCLUDE EVERY CHILD	Build program capacity for children with complex developmental, behavioral, or medical needs.

STABILIZE THE FIELD	Improve reimbursement rates, compensation, training pathways, and provider sustainability.

Source: NECC Local Needs Assessment, June 30, 2026.

A SHARED AGENDA FOR FAMILIES, SCHOOLS, TOWNS, AND PARTNERS

What we can do together

1 CHILDCARE	Advocate for sustainable childcare funding and family affordability; strengthen the childcare workforce through professional development, recruitment, and retention; engage providers to understand needs, address barriers, and elevate their voice; and collaborate with community partners and policymakers to expand local childcare capacity and strengthen the regional childcare system.
2 FAMILY CONNECTION	Continue to create clearer resource pathways; reach families earlier; expand peer connection and mental-health awareness; and encourage evening and weekend opportunities for families.
3 REGIONAL ACTION	Keep families, childcare & community providers, policy makers and other key stakeholders at the decision-making table; share data and resources; recruit missing voices; and foster collaboration across all seven towns.

NECC's role: connect, convene, elevate, and advocate

Connect families

Continue making resources easier to find and navigate through trusted connections & multiple communication channels.

Convene partners

Use the Community Table and workgroups to align efforts and reduce duplication.

Elevate parent voice

Engage Parent Ambassadors and families in planning, advocacy, & decision-making opportunities.

Advocate for systems change

Bring local evidence to regional and statewide conversations about funding and policy.

A strong foundation to build on

4 Parent Ambassadors	**1.8K** Followers on social media	**100+** community partners	**1,300+** families on email list

The next step

Use these findings to guide NECC's Community Plan, funding decisions, and measurable actions. **While the Community Plan focuses on several specific priorities, the NECC's broader initiatives, resources, and partnerships continue to address the full range of needs identified in the LNA.**

Prepared from the Final NECC Local Needs Assessment (June 30, 2026). The full report contains detailed methodology, town-level interpretation, and source information. To view the full NECC Local Needs Assessment: Final NECC Local Needs Assessment (LNA).docx