The desired outcomes are 1) a collective recognition of the importance of social and emotional development on lifelong health, development and learning; 2) a collective understanding of the central role of relationships in promoting optimal social and emotional development; 3) a collective acknowledgement of the window of opportunity to promote optimal social and emotional development in infants and young children because of the rapid brain formation and susceptibility to environmental influences; and 4) the creation of a comprehensive service delivery system for infants and young children and their families who require additional supports and intervention throughout Tennessee.

Goal 1: Raise **public awareness for parents, caregivers, family members, professionals and the community at large** of the unique social and emotional needs of children birth through age five and the consequences of poor social and emotional development.

*Rationale:* Extensive research highlights how early experiences and relationships form the basis for further development and learning as well as impact lifelong health. For communities to take effective action, all stakeholders must acquire this knowledge and understand how to apply these research findings.

Goal 2: Ensure that parents, caregivers, family members and providers involved across all disciplines and systems touching the life of a child know **strategies to promote social and emotional competence**.

*Rationale:* Training for parents, caregivers, family members and all professionals working with children typically emphasizes physical and cognitive aspects of child development. More recent knowledge about effective interventions for helping children achieve social and emotional developmental milestones has not yet been fully integrated into training and education programs. While a comprehensive plan to
develop an infant mental health practice specialty in appropriate disciplines is an important long-range goal, trainings for current practitioners can readily incorporate the strategies and practical implications of new research. Given that many practitioners will continue to be working in the field for another twenty to thirty years it is essential that they receive continuing education in order to apply and incorporate new research findings.

Goal 3: Develop a governance structure, public policies and financing mechanisms that support the promotion of healthy social and emotional development through cross-system collaborative prevention, early intervention, and treatment for children birth to age five.

Rationale: Current policies often do not view young children as needing or benefiting from mental health support or intervention, resulting in delayed interventions and insufficient school readiness with consequent long-term burdens on families, communities, and other public sector domains.

Goal 4: Develop a coordinated system to identify children birth to age five and their families that could benefit from additional supports and a consistent referral procedure to services in the context of the family, culture, and community.

Rationale: For children to begin school ready to learn and for families to receive appropriate formal supports when needed, an organized and effective method of screening and referring children is essential to make sure every child and family receive help at the earliest possible opportunity.

Goal 5: Create a system for providing early mental health assessment, treatment and transition planning for children birth to age five and their families.

Rationale: Traditional mental health services have not acknowledged that very young children can have mental disorders or be able to benefit from treatment; as a result, a system of care does not exist. New research has produced evidence that demonstrates mental disorders do appear in children before the age of five and that those children can make progress through effective treatment. Because some risks are exacerbated by the stressors encountered when transitioning into the school system, transitioning children from an early childhood system of care to a supportive school environment is a necessary component of a continuum of care.