

STRENGTHENING early childhood in KANSAS

"We are ALL Early Childhood Stakeholders"
Governor Laura Kelly

In 2019, Kansas has the opportunity through new federal grant funding to shape our state's future direction for early childhood by developing a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic plan. This collaborative effort invited the voices of all Kansans and resulted in an impressive cross-section of nearly 6,000 contributors. As part of this effort, individuals across the state joined to share their vision for the early childhood care and education (ECCE) system they want to see in their communities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

These community engagement sessions served as an impartial forum for sharing experiences and perspectives on the ECCE system now and in the future. Overall, sessions served to create a common foundation for statewide engagement, while also infusing energy into local activities associated with the care and support of families with young children and increasing engagement for future ECCE conversations. Participants discussed these questions:

What is working well in their local ECCE programs?

What they wish to see those programs and the broader system look like in the future?

What gaps might exist between the current system and that future vision?

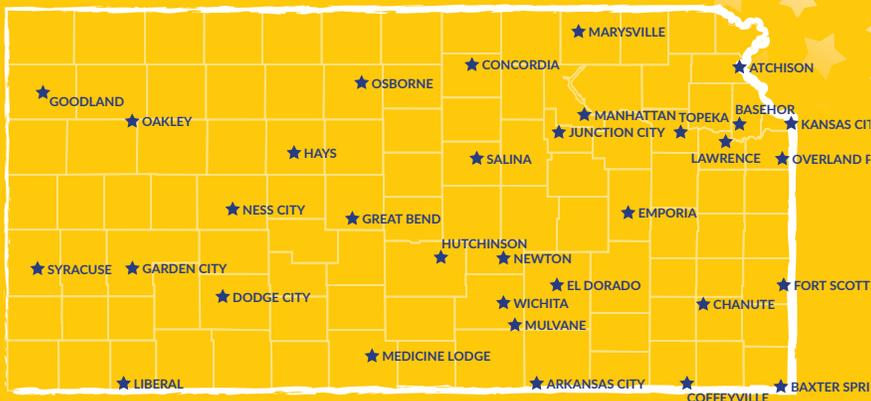
53
sessions

33
communities

1,300+
participants

PARTICIPANTS

- Parents and Grandparents
- Early Childhood Care and Education Professionals
- Childcare Providers and Staff
- Healthcare Professionals
- Teachers and School District Administrators
- State and Local Elected Officials
- Business and Philanthropic Leaders
- Social Service Providers
- Librarians and Recreation Center Staff
- Community Champions



"I want to interact with family experiences and get encouragement to be active in the community, and be proud of one's self and town."
- Parent

What we heard from Kansans

UNIVERSAL FINDINGS

Families have basic needs that are not being met, and that is driving the way they do or do not interact with the early childhood system. These experiences differ greatly across the state.

OTHER THEMES THAT EMERGED

- ★ Parent and professional perspectives are overwhelmingly practical.**
Before parents can focus on education and care, their basic needs must be met. Parent support and education on life and interpersonal skills should be normalized.
- ★ ECCE resources are generally provided “a la carte,” and reliant on customers to “connect the dots.”**
ECCE professionals report parents are often unaware of resources that could be beneficial to them.
- ★ ECCE resources, like childcare and preschool programs, are difficult to access and engage in, instead of being universally accessible as participants overwhelmingly desire.**
Services conflict with parents’ work schedules. Care is often expensive and in short supply and children are arriving to kindergarten unprepared.
- ★ Participants expressed concern about the ECCE workforce. A quality workforce is critical to delivering high-quality services to children and families.**
Low compensation and lack of respect for the profession lead to high turnover rates and create barriers for retaining high-quality professionals.
- ★ Eligibility requirements and operational regulations are complex, often conflicting and overall daunting for parents and program administrators.**
Parents mentioned being overwhelmed by the duplication of paperwork and interviews required to receive social service resources. Administrators and operators cited conflicting regulations from federal, state, and municipal authorities.
- ★ Structures and partners vary widely, and there is not a functional and distinct high-quality ECCE model.**
Participants frequently expressed desire for simpler systems with a vision of a single, common goal accepted by all public and private agencies and organizations. Unified practices in aspects like funding and workforce personnel are also needed.
- ★ Awareness and understanding of the importance of early childhood remains limited and inconsistent.**
Many parents are unaware of the critical role they play in their child’s development and the resources available to them. Community members often do not understand why ECCE is important for everyone.

“It’s a vicious cycle. Our families don’t make enough to pay for child care and our child care providers don’t make enough to stay in business. How do you entice quality folks and avoid a tremendously high burn-out rate?” - Community Leader

BRIGHT SPOTS

- Accessibility of library services
- Community-based programs that meet basic needs
- Strong early childhood programs
- Availability of free or low-cost recreation programs
- Support from business partnerships
- Collaboration at a community level

“If it affects one community member, it affects us all.”

- Parent