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For Immediate Release

More than 6,100 Kansans Inform a New Statewide Needs Assessment for Early Childhood.

Comprehensive report highlights areas of need and opportunities to improve the state's early childhood care and education system

After a year of touring the state and listening to the hopes, challenges, and stories of Kansans from all 105 counties, Kansas early childhood leaders released a comprehensive Needs Assessment highlighting the challenges and opportunities in Kansas' early childhood care and education system.

The Needs Assessment was conducted as part of the Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) initiative, awarded to the Kansas State Department of Education in late December 2018. The one-year planning grant also included funding to support the creation of a statewide strategic plan for early childhood, which is expected to be released in April 2020. The Strategic Plan will include strategies for addressing the issues highlighted in the Needs Assessment and outline next steps for strengthening the state's early childhood care and education system.

The Needs Assessment was released on Thursday, February 6, by the Kansas early childhood state directors' team, which is made up of representatives from the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund (Children's Cabinet), the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), and the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). The Children's Cabinet serves as the convener of early childhood alignment efforts across Kansas, per state statute.

The team collected and analyzed thousands of data points, which resulted in two central messages: Kansas families' experiences with the early childhood care and education system are profoundly shaped by where they live across the state and within communities, and many young Kansas children grow up in families who are struggling to meet their basic needs. Eight key findings support these messages, highlighting issues of accessibility, availability, navigation, collaboration, workforce, facilities, systems alignment, and bright spots.

More than 6,100 Kansans contributed to the data collection process, ranging from personal stories and online insights, to more than 100 in-person community conversations with parents, caregivers, business leaders, elected officials, health care providers, educators, and a wide variety of early childhood care and education professionals and champions across the state.

“This was an incredible opportunity for us to better understand what Kansans want from their early care and education system,” said Amanda Petersen, director of early childhood for the Kansas State Department of Education. “We heard about the unique challenges that families, providers, and communities are facing in supporting our youngest Kansans and their families. But we also heard about many success stories, and the pride and resilience that Kansans have in developing solutions to meet their communities’ needs.”

In addition to the voices of Kansans, the Needs Assessment also includes an analysis of 45 existing needs assessment reports and data collected from three new surveys on the early childhood care and education workforce, facilities, and Pre-K services.

“The findings of the Needs Assessment will directly inform our Strategic Plan,” said Melissa Rooker, executive director of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. “We have said all along we want to create a plan that is informed by and representative of all Kansans, and the comprehensive nature of this Needs Assessment provides the foundation to do just that. We are excited about the continuing partnership between our four key state agencies - KSDE, KDHE, DCF and the Children’s Cabinet - as we work together to take the next step in our journey to build a Strategic Plan that will help all Kansas children, families and communities thrive.”

The Kansas Statewide Early Childhood Care and Education Needs Assessment is currently available for online viewing or download on the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund website kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment. Kansans can also stay engaged in the process to develop the Statewide Strategic Plan by signing up for weekly email updates and participating in bi-weekly webinars. For more information and to lend your voice, visit kschildrenscabinet.org/early-childhood.

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