

STRATEGIC PLAN DRAFT

FEBRUARY 7, 2020

Commitment 1: Connected Families, Connected Communities

Commitment Statement

Kansas will empower and equip communities to create the best environments to raise a child.

Communities address their specific needs and challenges through coordinated strategies that improve access, availability, and quality. This approach--*Connected Families, Connected Communities*--lifts parent voice and choice, provides communities with the infrastructure and technical assistance to simplify navigation of services, and encourages collaboration and innovation.

Need

Kansans told us that fragmented service delivery disrupts smooth pathways for families. Parents must 'connect the dots' themselves to find and receive services. Families find it difficult to navigate the early childhood care and education system and told us that better collaboration and integration of services would help. Kansans also told us that the experiences of children and families differ based on the community in which they reside: geography matters. The social and concrete supports and resources available to families in rural and urban communities in Kansas varies widely.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Families are active and equal partners in the planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services that affect their children and families.

Strategy 1. Ensure community decision-making about services and programs for children and families is informed by meaningful and inclusive parent and family engagement.

Potential Recommendations

- Scale best practices for implementing Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards¹ across the state.

¹ *Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood* provide guidance for families, practitioners, community members, and educators to examine current practices and plan strategies to engage families in their children's development and learning.

- Ensure that families are able to select and receive services that are strengths-based, trauma-informed, and culturally competent.
- Ensure that all families are able to choose and equitably access services where they live and work.
- Compensate family engagement in all phases of planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs and services.

Strategy 2: Empower parents with the knowledge and tools to find and access services and information that supports their children's interests, healthy development, and learning.

Potential Recommendations

- Create and support campaigns that increase public awareness regarding the importance of early childhood, the availability of early childhood care and education programs, the importance of quality child care, and how to connect with services and support.
- Support parental choice about programs and services that best meet their children's interests and needs through accessible information and cooperative parent-provider partnership practices.
- Provide diverse opportunities for parental peer-to-peer support that are responsive to the needs and desires of families within a community.
- Amplify parent voices by developing leadership opportunities such as the Family Advisory Team, the Kansas Parent Leadership Advisory Council, and Parent Leadership Conference to galvanize and coalesce all parent advisory activities in the state and to inform the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel.²
- Improve access to early childhood care and education information by using clear, approachable language and intuitive navigation on state agency, organization, and association websites.

Goal 2. Communities and early childhood providers have the tools and information needed to streamline access to and navigation of high-quality services for children and families.

Strategy 1. Build and sustain the infrastructure necessary to identify available resources, drive quality referrals, coordinate care, and ease navigation of services for families.

Potential Recommendations

- Invest in and promote the 1-800-CHILDREN Helpline as a statewide centralized access point for providers and families seeking support, information, and resources.
- Implement and maintain an accurate and reliable statewide resource directory (Aunt Bertha) for families, agencies, providers, and helpline staff.
- Implement and maintain a robust community-led referral tool (Integrated Referral and Intake System³) to strengthen cross-sector partnerships, communication, and accountability when referring and connecting families to services.

² Pursuant to Executive Order No. 20-02, volunteers on this panel are convened by the Cabinet in an advisory role.

³ IRIS is a web-based communication tool to help organizations connect the families they serve to the right resources in their community.

- Support care coordination or navigation staff/services to assist families in accessing and engaging in services within and across systems for smooth transitions.
- Pilot and scale best practices for identifying needs, screening, referring, and engaging families into services, such as using common evidence-informed screening tools and workflows between partners for warm handoffs.
- Identify and scale smooth transition practices between early childhood care and education providers and other sectors across the life course.
- Provide targeted technical assistance on use of tools, resources, and practices that support parental choice, equitable access, and smooth transitions.

Goal 3. Communities are empowered to strengthen the quality and reach of early childhood care and education services in ways that address the unique needs of their population and geographical location.

Strategy 1. Strengthen state and community-level collaborations to maximize and leverage resources and adopt best practices for providing high-quality early childhood care and education services and supports.

Potential Recommendations

- Encourage community-level early childhood coalitions or community action teams to expand partnerships and leverage a variety of resources across a broader range of partners in the community, including schools, libraries, extension, civic partners, and businesses.
- Establish effective avenues for bi-directional feedback between state and local partners through the Kansas early childhood governance structure and workgroups.
- Support community-driven approaches to funding, designing, delivering, and coordinating early childhood care and education services that increase availability and accessibility.
- Promote a multi-generational approach and a continuum of services and programs that are universal and targeted to consider the needs of the whole family.
- Incentivize innovative solutions to improving quality, access, and availability of early childhood care and education services.
- Reward the development of equity-specific strategies that improve access for underserved populations at the community level.

Commitment 2: The Workforce

Commitment Statement

Kansas will lead the way in developing, supporting, and valuing early childhood care and education professionals.

All early childhood care and education professionals have the resources necessary to establish and deliver high-quality services to children and families, including professional development and equitable access to educational opportunities; industry investments that support fair compensation and opportunity; and safe, stable, nurturing work environments.

Need

Kansans told us that workforce and environmental challenges within the early childhood care and education system are an issue across the state, dramatically impacting accessibility and affordability for children and families. Early childhood care and education professionals do not have uniform standards and pathways or adequate resources to reach their full potential to provide quality services. Significant workforce needs include: preparation, compensation and financial relief such as education support and wage supplements; ongoing training and support; recruitment; and retention. Specific challenges called out by early childhood care and education providers include workforce shortages, an absence of credentials and opportunities to gain credentials, a lack of respect and value for the profession, and professional development primarily driven by regulations and what is available rather than needs of the workforce and the children and families served.

Kansas is currently in the development and implementation phase of a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).⁴ In 2014, Kansas made a commitment to develop an intentional and sustainable program. Kansas is currently completing a two-year pilot, *Links to Quality*, with the goal for expansion and statewide impact by 2022. As of January 2020, 41 states and the District of Columbia have a statewide QRIS program. Statewide availability of *Links to Quality* will assist child care providers with their continuous quality improvement efforts.

Kansas is one of only ten states without a workforce registry. Our existing workforce system is unnecessarily fragmented across organizations, providers, and disciplines. A registry provides a means for early childhood professionals and trainers to document their development and quality improvement accomplishments.

Currently, safety standards and episodic areas of focus in the field drive efforts to improve facilities and early childhood environments. Limited resources are available to support capital improvements, the creation

⁴ A QRIS is a framework to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. A QRIS awards quality ratings to programs that meet a set of defined program standards.

of new facilities, and additional learning materials to aid quality improvement. Kansas also lacks complete data regarding construction and renovation needs.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Kansas recruits, retains, and advances a diverse early childhood care and education workforce that is prepared and qualified to meet the changing needs of young children and families.

Strategy 1. Create an aligned and integrated workforce infrastructure across all state agencies that expands the number and diversity of professionals entering and remaining in all early childhood care and education fields.

Potential Recommendations

- Select, adopt, and promote core competencies and career pathways to support the delivery of high-quality services, and to facilitate career entrance and advancement.
- Expand opportunities for early childhood care and education preparation in high school that can be leveraged in higher education.
- Encourage institutes of higher education to develop clearly defined articulation agreements that help expand the early childhood care and education workforce.
- Create a workforce registry for early childhood care and education professionals to access and track professional development opportunities and to guide their career advancement.

Strategy 2. Align and implement a high-quality, competency-based professional development system utilized by all state agencies that meets the diverse needs of children, families, and professionals.

Potential Recommendations

- Coordinate professional development contracts, funding opportunities, and monitoring activities across state agencies.
- Select, promote, and provide training, coaching, and support to integrate best practices (e.g. trauma-informed care, early literacy) into service delivery.
- Align early childhood care and education professional development offerings with competencies and pathways to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- Identify and allocate resources to fill gaps in access and availability of high-quality professional development responsive to the needs of the workforce.

Strategy 3. Support diversity and equity in the early childhood care and education workforce

Potential Recommendations

- Expand financial incentives for under-represented populations to enter and remain in the workforce.

- Update and utilize culturally and linguistically appropriate materials in all early childhood care and education environments and professional development opportunities.
- Ensure all opportunities for career entry and advancement acknowledge and support a diverse workforce across cultural, language, learning style, abilities, and access differences.

Strategy 4. Create understanding of the role and impact of early childhood care and education professionals among policy-makers and the public, and improve policies that support early childhood care and education career viability.

Potential Recommendations

- Invest in strategic framing and marketing materials to improve shared understanding of the importance of early learning and the role of early childhood care and education professionals.
- Encourage the incorporation of professional supports such as paid professional development time, compensation, and benefits into state and local policies.
- Increase compensation and financial incentive packages for early childhood care and education professionals and early childhood care and education business owners through public and/or private sources.

Goal 2. Policies, procedures, and infrastructure support safe, stable, and nurturing environments for young children and families.

Strategy 1: Support the establishment of diverse child care options that meet the needs of children and families.

Potential Recommendations

- Explore and invest in business models that meet the unique needs of rural early childhood care and education providers.
- Create policies and funding mechanisms to support start-up costs for new child care facilities.
- Incentivize communities and businesses to invest in child care options responsive to prioritized community needs such as 2nd and 3rd shift child care.
- Prioritize investments in child care options for populations with special needs, such as children experiencing homelessness, children with special health care needs, tribal children, children impacted by the foster care or corrections system, and migrant children.

Strategy 2. Support early childhood care and education physical infrastructure improvements to ensure healthy and safe environments for children to grow and learn.

Potential Recommendations

- Increase investments in capital improvements for early childhood care and education program infrastructure.
- Align monitoring efforts to address challenges related

- Increase fiscal investments to address challenges related to foundational health, safety, and quality requirements for all early childhood care and education environments and facilities.

Strategy 3. Improve the quality of early learning environments.

Potential Recommendations

- Identify, analyze, and establish core quality standards that reflect best practices across all early childhood care and education programs and services.
- Expand QRIS (known as Links to Quality in Kansas) statewide to promote continuous quality improvement within child care environments.

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Commitment 3: Systems Alignment and Integration

Commitment Statement

Kansas will align the early childhood care and education system for maximum impact.

Kansas state agencies, organizations, and local leaders coordinate and integrate services so communities and families experience seamless, respectful, and responsive supports. Kansas aligns the governance and decision-making structure of our early childhood system to more effectively address barriers and inequities—both in policy and practice.

Need

Kansans told us there are disconnects between state agencies and local providers, which creates challenges for families and providers in finding the right information they need, accessing the right services for their needs, and navigating between systems. We must have greater systems alignment to fully realize an efficient and robust early childhood care and education infrastructure. This intentional alignment is necessary to improve coordination of state regulations and policy, data sharing, funding and resources, equity, and shared governance. Without systems alignment across agencies and organizations, children, families, and communities experience barriers that impede access, availability, and navigation of high-quality early childhood care and education services.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. The Kansas early childhood system is coordinated to optimize the well-being of young children and families.

Strategy 1. Streamline early childhood decision making structures and processes to improve access, availability, and navigation of services and systems for children and families.

Potential Recommendations

- Convene representatives of the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel Advisory Council and the Early Childhood State Directors regularly to coordinate and collaborate on shared vision, policies, and recommendations.
- Share requests for proposals, funding strategies, scopes of work, programming priorities, eligibility and reporting requirements among appropriate decision-making bodies.
- Ensure that all early childhood stakeholder meetings and workgroups have a clear purpose, focused and complementary goals, and shared communication strategies to support this strategic plan.

- Ensure state level coordination and alignment of monitoring, licensing, technical assistance, and programming requirements to community-based grantees and contractors.
- Develop a cross-agency common application process when possible allowing community-based providers to apply for funding that targets local needs and alleviates the grant-writing and reporting burden.
- Analyze and address institutional, regulatory, or policy constraints that make it more difficult for children and families to access services and programming across agencies and funding streams, without compromising safety or quality.

Strategy 2. Establish cross-sector partnerships to inform policies, programming, and practices that improve the experiences of children and families.

Potential Recommendations

- Integrate and support early childhood mental health services, programming, interventions, and training to children, families, and providers.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration to share necessary information between healthcare systems, schools, behavioral health, and community-based organizations to better serve children and families and support smooth transitions across sectors.
- Build cross-sector partnerships to improve shared understanding of the importance and intersection of early childhood to maximize alignment, navigation, and access to services across sectors.
- Identify economic development incentives that can support early childhood priorities, incorporate early childhood considerations into economic development incentives, and engage economic development stakeholders to make the business case for early childhood.

Goal 2. Policies, practices, and programming are child/family-centered to reflect the diverse needs and choices of all families.

Strategy 1. Advocate for family-friendly workplaces in public organizations, businesses, and private organizations.

Potential Recommendations

- Encourage diverse incentive options for employers to create family-friendly policies and accommodations. (e.g., tax credits, paid parental leave).
- Address whole-family needs, including working mothers, fathers, foster parents, grandparents and relatives.
- Integrate family-friendly accommodations and practice recommendations among child and family-serving organizations that receive state funding.

Strategy 2. Incentivize providers to offer services and programming that match the needs of working families and diverse populations.

Potential Recommendations

- Analyze and address local ordinances and state regulatory constraints and business practices that limit expanding capacity for child care providers in accordance with standards without negatively impacting health and safety.
- Explore financial incentives for expanding child care access, including but not limited to child care subsidy and eligibility requirements.

Strategy 3. Empower parent representatives, advocates, professionals, and communities to inform systems change.

Potential Recommendations

- Ensure inclusive representation in meaningful ways and engage tribal and community liaisons to actively inform state-level decision making and family-centered, culturally-appropriate services.
- Maintain transparent communication and feedback mechanisms and strategies to ensure information is conveyed consistently between state and local stakeholders.
- Apply an equity and diversity lens to examine the intended and unintended consequences of systems change at the state and local levels.

Goal 3. Early childhood data are integrated to measure what matters for children and families in the early years and beyond.

Strategy 1. Develop robust data governance trusts across agencies and organizations that ensure privacy, confidentiality, and consent when sharing data and information.

Potential Recommendations

- Improve state and local level understanding of ethical and legal data use across sectors serving children and families.
- Create a Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust and Governance structure to protect and enact data integration and sharing efforts.
- Apply robust safeguards, structures, and practices that will govern data sharing at the state and local level.
- Ensure that families, providers, state agencies, researchers, and policy makers can access usable information and data through established data governance protocols and procedures.
- Provide clear and consistent guidelines to state and local providers for consent and compliance with all federal/state data requirements, and data sharing parameters.

Strategy 2. Measure the effectiveness and impact of early childhood care and education services to improve outcomes for children over time.

Potential Recommendations

- Align, prioritize, and consolidate data practices (collection, sharing, reporting, and evaluation efforts and requirements) across agencies and funding streams to reduce burden and drive collective impact.
- Establish a Kansas Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems Core Group responsible for coordinating the technical and adaptive designs for combining data across early childhood care and education programs.
- Report on the unduplicated counts of children and families receiving services across the early childhood care and education system to assess access and equity.
- Report on indicators of healthy development, early learning, and strong families on an annual basis to monitor the quality, equity, and effectiveness of the early childhood care and education system.
- Ensure that early childhood data can be linked to other systems that serve children and families to analyze the impact of early childhood investments on long-term outcomes.

Commitment 4: Innovation and Scaling

Commitment Statement

Kansas will champion innovation and create opportunities to invest in the future of Kansas kids.

Kansas is home to resilient families and communities striving to create the best possible environments for young children to thrive. We will build on the strength of communities, organizations, and individuals who are passionate about improving the experiences of children and families.

Need

Kansans told us that there are bright spots that highlight innovations and ingenuity in all regions of the state. We need to be intentional about replicating and learning from these innovative practices to expand effectiveness and tailor for other communities. We also must scale up these bright spots to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the entire system. Our work must include identifying public and private funding opportunities, aligning and improving policies and regulations, and continually testing innovations that keep Kansas on the cutting edge. Building cross-sector partnerships and engaging Kansans in meaningful and ongoing ways is critical to the success of our system.

Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Kansas has policy and funding structures that support high-quality and innovative programming for children and families.

Strategy 1. Formalize agreements between public and private sectors to generate financial support for Kansas' early childhood strategic plan.

Potential Recommendations

- Explore public-private partnership models and select an appropriate model that reflects Kansas values and priorities.
- Establish a 501c3 endowment to support Kansas' early childhood care and education vision.
- Seek public and private funding to establish the endowment.
- Provide materials and resources to communicate the business case for investing in early childhood.

Strategy 2. Incorporate the children's budget into routine investment monitoring and funding decisions.

Potential Recommendations

- Establish an annual fiscal mapping process.
- Expand the scope of data collected for the 2019 fiscal map to include numbers served and shared measures with outcomes.
- Utilize a dashboard to understand current funding, identify opportunities for alignment, and inform future investments.

Strategy 3. Designate funds to solicit, pilot, and evaluate innovative strategies that anticipate needs and respond to trends.

- Set aside funds for exploratory ideas to amplify positive outcomes and reduce negative consequences.

Strategy 4. Generate policy recommendations that support the efficiency and effectiveness of programming and infrastructure.

Potential Recommendations

- Gather ongoing public input to help state leaders keep their finger on the pulse of Kansans, so that we can adapt and change course as needed.
- Engage stakeholders in identifying and understanding policy barriers impacting access and availability of services.
- Utilize the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel to provide technical expertise and recommend policy and regulatory changes.

Goal 2. Kansas is on the cutting edge of innovative and future-oriented practices that transform the lives of young children and families.

Strategy 1. Support effective use of data across state agencies that provides foresight on trends impacting children and families.

Potential Recommendations

- Establish a Kansas Quality Insight Consortium with representatives of state agencies, local providers, researchers, and data analysts to coordinate and align evaluation efforts and impact analyses.
- Create routine opportunities to exchange ideas, share successes and lessons learned, and encourage rapid-cycle innovation.
- Establish a story bank for continuous engagement of Kansans to capture lived experience and respond more quickly to emerging needs.
- Establish mechanisms for micro-grants to organizations and communities to address specific or unique needs.
- Provide technical assistance to organizations and communities to develop, test, and evaluate new strategies.