

A young child with dark hair, wearing a grey sweater over a white shirt, is reaching up with their right hand towards a large, iridescent bubble. The child is looking up at the bubble with a focused expression. The background is softly blurred, showing green foliage and a bright, airy indoor setting.

All In For Kansas Kids

Early Childhood Strategic Plan

Acknowledgements

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background - Why Kansas Needs a Strategic Plan for Early Childhood	4
Importance of Early Childhood	5
History and Milestones	5
What Do Our Youngest Kansans Need?	6
Needs Assessment Key Findings	7
Our Vision and Mission.....	8
The Blueprint for Early Childhood.....	9
Early Childhood Care and Education Mixed-Delivery System	9
About This Plan - Responding to the Needs of Kansans	10
How Was This Plan Created?	11
Guiding Principles.....	12
Key Definitions	12
Framework.....	13
Crosswalk.....	14
Goals and Strategies - Our Five-Year Plan	15
Goal 1: State-Level Coordination	16
Goal 2: Community-Level Coordination	20
Goal 3: Family Knowledge and Choice	23
Goal 4: Private Sector Collaboration	26
Goal 5: Capacity and Access	29
Goal 6: Workforce	33
Goal 7: Quality and Environments.....	37
Implementation - The Plan in Action	40
Children’s Cabinet Leads the Charge	41
Kansas Early Childhood Governance Structure	42
Changemakers and Champions	43
Resources to Support and Sustain This Journey.....	44
Timeline	44
Conclusion.....	45
Thank You to Our Contributors	46
Endnotes	49



BACKGROUND

Why Kansas Needs a Strategic Plan for Early Childhood

- Importance of Early Childhood
- History and Milestones
- What Do Our Youngest Kansans Need?
- Needs Assessment Key Findings
- Our Vision and Mission
- The Blueprint for Early Childhood

Importance of Early Childhood

Decades of scientific research underscore the importance of high-quality¹ early childhood programs and experiences. We know that children make more than a million neural connections each second from birth to age three, and these neurons form a brain architecture that can shape a child's entire life trajectory. Early relationships, experiences, and environment all heavily influence this critical period of brain development. When young children experience stressful conditions – like economic hardship, neglect, or abuse – these negative experiences² can disrupt the progress of their developing brains, which can in turn lead to lifelong challenges. **With more than 90% of a child's brain architecture developed by age five, there is no time to lose; our efforts to prepare young Kansans for success hinge on this critical early period of growth.**

Investing early in a child's life pays dividends for decades. Children who experience high-quality early childhood care and education have shown positive effects³ that last a lifetime. They tend to have better educational and health outcomes and higher graduation rates, and earn higher lifetime salaries. Additionally, high-quality early learning opportunities have been shown⁴ to lessen the harmful effects of economic insecurity, toxic stress, and trauma for children whose basic needs are not met early in life.

History and Milestones

Kansas has a long history of valuing early childhood as the foundation for a fulfilling life. We were the first state in the nation to establish a children's trust fund in 1980. In 1999, Kansas lawmakers again demonstrated a strong commitment to our state's future by enacting legislation to transform the original trust fund into the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund and the Children's Initiatives Fund (CIF). This landmark legislation dedicated Kansas' annual payments from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement to the KEY Fund and the CIF⁵ and created the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund⁶ (Children's Cabinet). The Children's Cabinet is charged with developing and implementing a coordinated and comprehensive early childhood care and education system⁷, aligning and facilitating interagency cooperation, and advising the governor and legislature regarding investments in early childhood programs and services.

Since 2003, Kansas has had an Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems⁸ (ECCS) initiative in place, managed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. ECCS works to improve outcomes for child and family well-being by building systems at the state and local levels that support children birth through five and their families, specifically emphasizing the importance of developmental screenings and subsequent referrals to appropriate services.

In 2010, Kansas passed critically important child care legislation⁹ to protect Kansas children. Lexie's Law, named for a Kansas toddler who suffered a preventable fatal injury while in child care, strengthened Kansas child care licensing requirements in an effort to prevent future tragedies. This built on the foundational child care policy of 1994.¹⁰

In 2015, the Kansas State Board of Education announced a new vision statement for education in Kansas¹¹: *Kansas leads the world in the success of each student*. Thousands of Kansans shared their perspectives to shape this vision, and they recognized the critical importance of early childhood in student success. The State Board identified kindergarten readiness as one of five key outcomes to measure progress. Achieving this new vision will require early intervention, support, and resources that prioritize the needs of each individual child.

In 2019, key agency staff with responsibility for early childhood initiatives formed the State Directors Team¹² to collaboratively strengthen the Kansas early childhood system. This team is made up of agency directors who have significant roles administering agency activities (Kansas Department for Children and Families, Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund).

Today, we continue our journey toward a Kansas in which all children and families thrive. Fueled by an extensive and robust needs assessment process conducted in 2019¹³, Kansans are embarking on a process of regular and continual strategic planning, data gathering, feedback monitoring, and action.

What Do Our Youngest Kansans Need?

Our vision for early childhood in Kansas is that every child thrives. In December 2018, Kansas was awarded federal grant funding¹⁴ to help explore how closely reality aligns with that vision. We set out to better understand the opportunities and gaps of our current system and what Kansans envision for their children and families.

These realities do not match our collective vision of Kansas as a place where *every child thrives*. Kansas is home to 196,826 children under the age of five¹⁵, and far too many of these children and their families continue to face issues of accessibility, availability, and navigation in their efforts to seek high-quality care and education during a child's early years. At the same time, those committed to the care and education of our youngest Kansans face multiple obstacles that impact both the availability and quality of care and education.

This effort, detailed in our Needs Assessment report, uncovered two stark realities:

Families' experiences are profoundly shaped by where they live across the state and within communities. Geography impacts the availability and accessibility of early care and education services and supports, creating isolation and navigation barriers.

- **18 counties** are considered Health Professional Shortage Areas, and 22 counties are considered Dental Health Shortage Areas¹⁶.
- **61 counties** – more than half the state – are designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas¹⁷.

Too many young Kansas children grow up in families where basic needs are not met. The struggle to meet basic needs such as food, housing, and health care prevents families from fully meeting their child's developmental needs.

- **Nearly 20%** of Kansas children ages birth to five are in families living at or below the federal poverty level (in 2019, less than \$21,330 annually for a family of three)¹⁸.
- For single Kansas parents of infants and toddlers, **child care costs 48.7% of total income**¹⁹.
- **23% of Kansas households** with infants and toddlers have low or very low food security²⁰.



Overcoming these challenges to effectively meet the needs of Kansas children and families requires a collective vision supported by attainable goals, concrete strategies, actionable tactics, and indicators of success. This All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan articulates that vision and charts the path forward.

Read the full Needs Assessment at
kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment

Needs Assessment Key Findings

These realities for Kansas children, families, communities, and our workforce were seen time and again in our eight key findings.



Accessibility: Families with young children experience inequitable access to high-quality programs and services across the broader early childhood system²¹.

- **49% of Kansas families** with children younger than age six qualify for home visiting services, but only 9% receive home visiting services²².



Availability: Families with young children experience a gap between the services that are available and their actual needs, disproportionately affecting vulnerable and underserved populations²³.

- **44% of Kansans live in a child care desert**²⁴, which particularly impacts rural, low-income, and Latino populations²⁵.



Navigation: Families must adopt a “connect the dots” approach to navigate services across sectors; disruptors are frequent and common.

- **54% of child care centers** surveyed self-report that they never or rarely provide information to families about community services, missing a key opportunity to help families²⁶.
- **22.9% of Kansas children exit** early intervention services at age three (Part C) without a supported transition to preschool early intervention services (Part B)²⁷.



Workforce²⁸: Early childhood workforce needs at both the leadership and direct service levels include preparation, compensation/financial relief, ongoing training and support, and recruitment and retention.

- The average child care worker **pay in Kansas is \$9.25 per hour** vs. \$27.73 per hour for an elementary public school teacher²⁹.
- **15% of child care center employees** receive no benefit plan for full-time work³⁰.



Facilities: Needs exist related to the physical conditions and environments of early childhood facilities across the state.

- **61% of child care centers** surveyed do not have a working security system³¹.
- **Only 8% of child care facilities** offer nontraditional hours³².



Collaboration: Early childhood providers and stakeholders share a desire for collaboration and cooperation, but these efforts are often disconnected and uncoordinated.

- **Only 35% of Kansas public school districts** responding to a Pre-K survey have a formal transition plan or process for transitioning children from external early childhood programs into kindergarten. 13% do not have any transition plans at all³³.



Systems Alignment: Greater systems alignment is needed to fully realize an efficient and robust early childhood care and education infrastructure.

- **Kansas lacks the capacity** to determine an accurate unduplicated count of children being served in early childhood care and education programs.



Bright Spots³⁴: Efficient, innovative, and responsive efforts are occurring among early childhood care and education system partners in communities throughout the state.

- **Over one-third of Our Tomorrows stories contained bright spots** and shared examples of how Kansans are supported by friends, family, neighbors, services, and systems during challenging times.

Our Vision and Mission

The Kansas vision and mission for early childhood are outlined in the Children’s Cabinet Blueprint for Early Childhood (Blueprint)³⁵. **Our vision** is that Kansas is a place where *every child thrives*. All children will have their basic needs met and have equitable access to quality early childhood care and education, so they are prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

Our mission is to build a solid foundation for Kansas children and families. When children and families have a solid foundation of services and support, and the early childhood system is aligned and coordinated, we know children will thrive.

Supportive relationships and healthy environments are critical during the early years, and a solid foundation in early childhood looks like this:

- Pregnant women receive early prenatal care, education, and other family-centered services and supports.
- Infants are born at healthy birth weights and receive optimal nutrition and nurturing.
- Children receive physical and mental health screenings and interventions, are current with immunizations, and reach developmentally appropriate milestones.
- Families can afford early childhood care and education options that meet their needs.
- Early care and education professionals are competent, credentialed, and effective.
- Child care facilities, early learning programs, and family support services are high-quality and able to meet the demand for services.
- Children are in safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments, and no children experience economic hardship, abuse, or neglect.



The Blueprint for Early Childhood

Methods for ensuring a solid foundation in early childhood are presented in the Blueprint and organized into three building blocks: Healthy Development, Strong Families, and Early Learning. The Blueprint is our state's framework for building a system where *every child thrives*.

The Blueprint recognizes the early years as a critical period for intervention that establishes a child's foundation for school and life success. The document provides a common language, shared vision, and guidance for cross-sector collaboration in the delivery

of high-quality programs and services. The Blueprint offers a common framework for making a difference in a child's life and determining impact for each of the three building blocks. While the paths to success may vary, our vision of *every child thriving* and this Blueprint are intended to guide innovative program design, partnership development, sharing of best practices, and tracking of long-term outcomes for children and families. Together, the Blueprint and the **All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** align the activities of agencies and providers in our state's mixed-delivery system³⁶ around common goals.

Early Childhood Care and Education Mixed-Delivery System





ABOUT THIS PLAN

Responding to the Needs of Kansans

- How Was this Plan Created?
- Guiding Principles
- Key Definitions
- Framework
- Crosswalk

How Was this Plan Created?

During 2019, more than 6,100 Kansans representing each of our 105 counties contributed to this work. We intentionally reached out to hear directly from parents and caregivers, family members, providers, and leaders in early childhood care and education programs. We also intentionally gathered information in a variety of formats, from in-person meetings such as Parent Cafés, Community Engagement Sessions, and facilitated Visioning Sessions, to online offerings like our weekly emails, biweekly webinars, story collection efforts, and an online share form. At every turn we listened, learned, and collected evidence about both the current status of the Kansas early childhood care and education system and what Kansans envision it to be. This process uncovered many Bright Spots (success stories) to shape a new strategic plan. We analyzed this massive amount of qualitative and quantitative data and then transformed the results into a comprehensive Needs Assessment and the preliminary framework of our strategic plan.

As the early ideas of the **All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** began to form, our conversations shifted from data collection to asking for specific strategies and tactics Kansans want to focus on. We heard personal stories, specific challenges and opportunities, innovative approaches, and action steps we can all take together to build the future we want for our children and families.

In October 2019, more than 400 early childhood stakeholders, including parents, professionals, business leaders, and policymakers, gathered for the Governor’s Symposium on Early Childhood. Governor Laura Kelly’s opening remarks energized an already enthusiastic crowd, including some of our youngest Kansans themselves, while state and local leaders sparked discussion and idea generation for our new plan.

Late in the year, we traveled the state again for a 10-stop roadshow to discuss findings from our Needs Assessment and to dive into generating specific ideas and action steps within the plan’s framework.

Recognizing the geographic diversity of our state and wanting to hear from as many Kansas voices as possible, we continually asked for feedback through our online

Planning Methods and Contributors

- Collected and analyzed challenges and Bright Spots from 81 online respondents
- Held 53 Community Engagement Sessions across Kansas with 1,337 total participants
- Facilitated 20 Visioning Sessions with 510 participants
- Hosted 14 Parent Cafés with 130 parents/caregivers
- Collected and analyzed more than 2,600 personal stories from the Our Tomorrows project
- Collected ideas from more than 400 attendees at the Governor’s Symposium on Early Childhood
- Collected ideas for priorities and strategies from 116 online respondents
- Traveled around the state – hosting 10 sessions with 183 participants – to present Needs Assessment findings and facilitate conversations on priorities and goals
- Collected feedback online and in-person on draft goals from 120 respondents

communication channels. We engaged Kansans through our live bimonthly webinars, an online share form, social media platforms, and weekly email updates to more than 1,420 subscribers (as of March 2020). The Children’s Cabinet website became an online repository of resources for idea generation with documents such as the initial strategic plan framework and Needs Assessment key findings.

Using these findings, Bright Spots, and the ideas and insights from all the community conversations, online submissions, and stakeholder meetings, we worked across state agencies to build a responsive plan. The State Directors Team led the process and set the tone for a plan that would be inspirational and actionable. Kansans’ feedback shaped and prioritized the work.

We collaborated with subject matter experts across the state to review draft tactics and gather feedback on key concerns: workforce and professional development, smooth transitions to Pre-K and kindergarten, parent leadership and family engagement, early childhood care and education program capacity, access and quality, universal home visiting models, and safe facilities and environments.

In February 2020, a first draft of the **All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** was presented to the Children’s Cabinet and the Kansas Early Childhood Stakeholders Group for input. It was also shared during the February 2020 bimonthly Early Childhood Systems–Building Webinar³⁷ and then posted for public comment on the Children’s Cabinet website.

This multipronged approach to gathering input and processing feedback, beginning in early 2019 with the needs assessment process and continuing through the drafting of this strategic plan, will help ensure that the All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan reflects the perspectives of all Kansans. This broad base of perspectives has resulted in a plan that will have a meaningful impact on those closest to the work and the children and families they serve.

Guiding Principles

Six guiding principles provided direction for developing All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan goals, strategies, and tactics. As we implement this plan, we are committed to adhering to these same principles and deliberately taking action that aligns with them.

- **Child- and family-centered:** Keep the needs and choices of children and families at the forefront of decision-making to ensure they get what they need to thrive.
- **Data-driven:** Use findings to inform the direction of early childhood care and education services. Routinely seek input and analyze data from multiple sources to ensure resource allocations, policy recommendations, and programming decisions reflect the realities of Kansans.
- **Strengths-based:** Use language and strategies that foster hope, ensure universal dignity, and describe ideal outcomes that Kansans believe are possible.
- **Equitable³⁸:** Identify areas where children and families experience disproportionate outcomes across race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical and developmental abilities, and geography. Actively assess policies and programs to determine if every child and their family has access to the resources they want and need.
- **Transparent and accountable:** Communicate often on the status, activities, and progress of this plan. Practice continuous quality improvement toward long-term outcomes. Expect mutual transparency, accountability, and engagement.
- **Transformative and dynamic:** Build on the strong early childhood foundation in Kansas to align efforts, maximize resources, and transform the child and family experience. Recognize contextual factors and anticipate future trends, so the plan can adapt to the changing needs of children and families.



It will take collaboration and action on multiple fronts to meet the goals of our All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan.

Key Definitions

As we developed both our Needs Assessment and the All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan, we defined key terms to reflect our guiding principles and establish a common understanding among partners and stakeholders. The notes section at the end of this document includes a glossary, and the key terms below offer specificity on the audiences for the goals and strategies outlined in this plan.

- **The Kansas early childhood care and education system** is a system of coordinated and comprehensive supports and core services that support healthy development, strong families, and early learning. Core services include early care and education; home visiting; parent education; maternal child health programs; and services, supports, and infrastructure where a child between the ages of birth through five years is the primary recipient.
- **Underserved children** for purposes of this document are defined as children who experience barriers or challenges to accessing or engaging in high-quality early childhood care and education services for a range of reasons, including but not limited to: low household income or economic instability, homelessness, trauma, parental incarceration, foster care risk or placement, special health care and developmental needs, or migrancy. Children from rural environments, tribal populations, and infants and toddlers are also considered underserved for this Strategic Plan.
- **Equity/equitable access/diversity** – Equity is the proportional distribution of resources and outcomes across groups based on existing and differential levels of access and opportunity. Equity is not the same as equality; while equality asks us to disburse resources evenly regardless of social, cultural and/or historical barriers, equity requires recognition that individuals and families from certain marginalized groups require more resources, supports, and attention to achieve the same outcomes as their peers from dominant social or cultural groups. We acknowledge diversity in our work as a range of community and individual experiences, situations, and identities, and we work to address equitable access with regard to: resources and services, language differences and literacy barriers, housing access and economic distress, access to basic needs, cultural and social isolation, physical and attitudinal barriers, education opportunities, and discrimination on the basis of race, appearance, age, ethnicity, immigrant status, religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ability.

Framework

We have organized the **All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** into seven goal areas, each with a statement on the desired outcome, followed by a brief narrative that underscores the need for that goal area and what we envision for Kansans.

- **Goal 1: State-Level Coordination**
- **Goal 2: Community-Level Coordination**
- **Goal 3: Family Knowledge and Choice**
- **Goal 4: Private Sector Collaboration**
- **Goal 5: Capacity and Access**
- **Goal 6: Workforce**
- **Goal 7: Quality and Environments**

Icons indicate which key finding from our Needs Assessment this goal area addresses. Specific strategies and tactics follow and outline measurable steps we must take to achieve desired results. Finally, we identify statements of success

and pose a list of indicator questions and sample measures to help us all evaluate efforts.

To help Kansans see themselves as key contributors to the important work ahead, each tactic displays one or more icons representing where the stakeholder roles outlined below can have impact.



State: State agencies



Local: Individuals or small group champions



Partner: Statewide and/or community-level organizations, businesses, school systems, and philanthropy



Policy: Elected officials

CROSSWALK

Goals to Needs Assessment Key Findings

Goals and Outcome Statements	Needs Assessment Key Findings						
	Accessibility	Availability	Navigation	Workforce	Facilities	Collaboration	Systems Alignment
<p>1. State-Level Coordination</p> <p>The early childhood care and education system is structured and aligned for maximum impact.</p>							
<p>2. Community-Level Coordination</p> <p>Communities are empowered and equipped to create the best environments to raise a child.</p>							
<p>3. Family Knowledge and Choice</p> <p>Families have what they need to make informed decisions and can get services where they live and work.</p>							
<p>4. Private Sector Collaboration</p> <p>Kansas is a champion of public-private collaboration and creates opportunities to invest in the future of Kansas kids and families.</p>							
<p>5. Capacity and Access</p> <p>Kansas families have their basic needs met and have equitable access to quality early childhood care and education services.</p>							
<p>6. Workforce</p> <p>Kansas leads the way in developing, supporting, and valuing early childhood professionals.</p>							
<p>7. Quality and Environments</p> <p>Kansas early childhood care and education programs and environments are high-quality, safe, and nurturing.</p>							



GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Our Five-Year Plan

- Goal 1: State-Level Coordination
- Goal 2: Community-Level Coordination
- Goal 3: Family Knowledge and Choice
- Goal 4: Private Sector Collaboration
- Goal 5: Capacity and Access
- Goal 6: Workforce
- Goal 7: Quality and Environments



GOAL 1

State-Level Coordination

Outcome Statement: The early childhood care and education system is structured and aligned for maximum impact.

Kansans told us there are disconnects between state agencies and local providers that make it hard for both families and service providers to find information, access the right services, and navigate between systems.

We recognize that we must build and grow partnerships among all state agencies that support families, including those outside traditional early childhood care and education programs. We envision an equitable system that meets the needs of our communities and all families. Improved state-level coordination helps ensure that regulations and policy, data sharing, funding and resources, and overall governance lead to better outcomes for Kansas children. As a state, we will achieve maximum impact through specific strategies that help coordinate and streamline referrals, provide technical assistance, and increase parent knowledge and access to services.

Key Findings



Accessibility



Navigation



Availability



Collaboration



Systems Alignment



Strategy 1.1

Streamline state-level early childhood decision-making structures and processes.

- 
1.1.1 Initiate the governance structure for the Kansas early childhood care and education system to collaborate on and monitor implementation of the strategic plan.
- 
1.1.2 Deliver technical assistance³⁹ to local collaborative groups that represent a variety of early childhood settings, sectors, and families, such as early childhood local coordinating councils, child care provider coalitions, collaborative entities, and advisory councils.
- 
1.1.3 Standardize agency expectations around monitoring, licensing, and technical assistance for community-based providers, and incorporate these expectations for accountability into associated contracts.
- 
1.1.4 Develop a cross-agency, common application⁴⁰ process – where applicable – that streamlines the grant-writing and reporting process for community-based grantees and contractors.

Strategy 1.2

Strengthen relationships between state agencies to inform and align policies, improve practices, and maximize resources.

- 
1.2.1 Map requests for proposals, funding strategies and requirements, scopes of work, programming priorities, eligibility, and reporting requirements across state agencies that fund early childhood care and education programs to identify areas of efficiency and alignment.
- 
1.2.2 Strengthen relationships between state agencies that implement early childhood care and education programs and those that provide other supports to children and families such as housing, transportation, economic supports (cash, food, and child care assistance), employment, child welfare, and behavioral health services so families have their basic needs met.
- 
1.2.3 Strengthen relationships between state agencies that implement early childhood care and education programs and those that implement critical components of the early childhood care and education infrastructure, including workforce development, higher education, and economic development.

Strategy 1.3

Implement an integrated set of tools and practices at the state level that support families and providers with connecting to the right service at the right time.

- 
1.3.1 Promote the 1-800-CHILDREN helpline as a statewide resource (centralized access point)⁴¹ for providers and families who are unsure where to go and are seeking early childhood care and education support, information, and resources. Ensure accuracy of helpline data through the implementation and maintenance of Aunt Bertha⁴², a statewide resource directory.

- 
1.3.2 Facilitate the expansion of the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS)⁴³ with interested communities in an effort to strengthen provider partnerships, communication, and accountability when connecting families to services.
- 
1.3.3 Connect providers and communities to technical assistance to help them effectively adopt and implement the tools, resources, and practices that meet their needs to streamline navigation for families.
- 
1.3.4 Identify and support telehealth⁴⁴ opportunities in a variety of health care and early childhood care and education settings to increase access to specialty services in rural areas.

Strategy 1.4

Develop an early childhood care and education integrated data system.

- 
1.4.1 Create a governance structure for data integration, and develop guidelines, agreements, and procedures for information sharing that ensure ethical use, data integrity, privacy, and consent.
- 
1.4.2 Establish a Kansas Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) Core Group to coordinate the work involved with analyzing data across early childhood care and education programs.
- 
1.4.3 Collect and analyze information (stories) received from Kansans with lived experiences (program participation, quality, outcomes, and community access) to inform decision-making at the state level.
- 
1.4.4 Analyze data to generate an unduplicated count of children receiving early childhood care and education services.
- 
1.4.5 Link appropriate early childhood data to other systems that serve children and families to analyze the long-term impact of early childhood investments.

Strategy 1.5

Measure the effectiveness and impact of early childhood care and education services over time and use this information to improve outcomes for children.

- 
1.5.1 Review the necessity and value of data collection, sharing, reporting, and evaluation requirements across state agencies and funding streams. Adjust and align approaches to reduce burden and drive collective impact.
- 
1.5.2 Use unduplicated counts of children and families receiving services across the early childhood care and education system to guide decision-making, including where to allocate resources at the regional, county, and/or community level to meet the identified need.
- 
1.5.3 Develop shared early childhood care and education indicators related to healthy development, early learning, and strong families. Report on the indicators on an annual basis to identify trends and monitor quality, equity, and effectiveness.

What Will Success Look Like?

- The early childhood care and education governance structure will enable Kansas to implement the All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan, respond to challenges, elevate recommendations from communities and stakeholders, and make key decisions.
- Kansas state agencies will successfully coordinate and align efforts on activities like requests for proposals, funding strategies and requirements, scopes of work, programming priorities, eligibility requirements, and reporting.
- Kansas state agency contracts will include streamlined expectations around monitoring, licensing, and technical assistance.
- Kansas will have a common application available for state-funded early childhood programs.
- Kansas families will have greater access to needed services through telehealth.
- Kansas will develop and operate an early childhood integrated data system.
- Kansas will annually report on indicators around healthy development, early learning, and strong families.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
To what extent are families and providers receiving and satisfied with information through 1-800-CHILDREN and the resource directory?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of 1-800-CHILDREN contact points Number of 1-800-CHILDREN mobile application downloads 1-800-CHILDREN satisfaction survey Number of resource directory searches
To what extent are providers sending and receiving effective referrals through the community-customized electronic referral tool (Integrated Referral and Intake System or IRIS)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of referrals received and sent by providers and percent of referred families enrolled in services
To what extent can Kansas pull accurate information regarding the number of children receiving early childhood care and education services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of agencies and partners signed on to data trust⁴⁵ Number of partners who contribute data Number of unduplicated children receiving early childhood care and education services Percent of early childhood care and education programs with accurate unduplicated counts Number and demographic profile of children and families served in each early childhood care and education service or program
To what extent is Kansas using data to analyze and monitor the quality, equity, and effectiveness of its early childhood care and education system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and type of data-driven decision-making tools or analytics for access and use
To what extent are data collection requirements and evaluation questions aligned across agencies that fund early childhood care and education services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and type of data elements in common across funding agencies serving children and families



GOAL 2

Community-Level Coordination

Outcome Statement: Communities are empowered and equipped to create the best environments to raise a child.

Kansans told us it is difficult for families to find and access services when they need them. Often, families must “connect the dots” themselves, and they tell us that better collaboration among providers would help.

We recognize that Goal 1: State-level coordination is critical to improving community-level coordination. Improved coordination, infrastructure, and technical assistance will help Kansas providers build partnerships within their communities – and statewide – to generate community-specific solutions. We envision communities will use shared tools and strategies to help families find information, access the right services, and navigate between systems. Communities will lift family voice, expand family choice, and engage a diverse representation of local champions to address their unique challenges.

Key Findings



Accessibility



Navigation



Availability



Collaboration



Strategy 2.1

Develop localized comprehensive resource and referral networks that meet community-specific needs to drive quality referrals, coordinate care, and ease navigation for families.

- 
2.1.1 Create the opportunity for providers and families to access information about the available resources in their community. This could include a community-specific and/or statewide centralized access point and resource guide.
- 
2.1.2 Establish a network of providers at the community level who refer families to services, communicate capacity and referral outcomes, and strengthen overall community partnerships and collaboration.
- 

2.1.3 Use evidence-based, standardized screenings such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) and the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale to identify need and connect families to the right services as early as possible.
- 

2.1.4 Offer families with newborns a developmental screening passport to track development and support communication between them and providers.
- 
2.1.5 Emphasize care coordination⁴⁶ that identifies and aligns with family needs and preferences across providers and settings.

Strategy 2.2

Build meaningful and inclusive family engagement into community decision-making about programs and services.

- 
2.2.1 Identify parent or family groups that exist within the community, and seek feedback on their needs and suggestions for increasing family representation in community decision-making about programs and services.
- 
2.2.2 Respond to the cultural, ethnic, racial, language, and socioeconomic characteristics and preferences of families to create equitable family engagement opportunities at the community level.
- 
2.2.3 Include family representatives from the local community on coalitions and/or advisory councils, and as program evaluators, co-trainers of pre-service or in-service training sessions, mentors for other families and professionals, grant and application reviewers, and participants in needs assessment processes.



What Will Success Look Like?

- Kansas early childhood care and education providers will prioritize collaboration and communication to ensure that families know of services in their communities.
- Kansas families will be engaged as leaders and viewed as partners in decision-making for early childhood care and education services in their community.
- Kansas communities will prioritize and support family-friendly events and outreach activities.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
To what extent are providers in a community making effective referrals?	Number of referrals received and sent by providers Percent of referred families enrolled in services
What percentage of children and families receive appropriate screenings for their developmental, social-emotional, or basic needs?	Percent of children birth to five years with at least one Ages and Stages Questionnaire screening before kindergarten Percent of children birth to five years achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones according to Ages and Stages Questionnaire Percent of children and families referred to additional services based on a screening
To what extent are families engaged in decision-making?	Number of family members on local coalitions and/or advisory councils, and as program evaluators, co-trainers of pre-service or in-service training sessions, mentors for other families and professionals, grant and application reviewers, and participants in a needs assessment process
To what extent is state funding allocated to care coordination?	Number of state-funded positions and resources dedicated to care coordination or navigation practices
To what extent are families and providers accessing services?	Number of contacts from families to resource information websites



GOAL 3

Family Knowledge and Choice

Outcome Statement: Families have what they need to make informed decisions and can get services where they live and work.

Kansans told us there is inconsistent awareness of the importance of early childhood and the critical role parents and caregivers play in their child's development. Families don't always know what services and programs are available in their own communities, and there is not always equitable access to those opportunities.

We recognize that Kansas families must have the right information and tools to empower choice and ensure equitable access to services. We envision that families will be equal partners in the planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of services that affect them. Ensuring families are at the center of decision-making will result in a "nothing about us, without us" system.

Key Findings



Accessibility



Navigation



Collaboration



Workforce



Systems Alignment



Strategy 3.1

Provide families with tools and information to support their children's interests, healthy development, and learning.

- 
3.1.1 Conduct culturally responsive public awareness campaigns about the importance of brain development in early childhood and the benefits of high-quality early environments and conditions that lead to safe, stable, and nurturing relationships.
- 
3.1.2 Maintain the Kansas Quality Network website and list family leadership opportunities in a single online location.
- 
3.1.3 Invest in opportunities for family peer-to-peer support and information sharing through investments and programs such as Kansas' Supporting You Peer-to-Peer Network.
- 
3.1.4 Provide unique opportunities for families to engage with providers in their communities through events such as community baby showers, health fairs, and back-to-school nights.
- 
3.1.5 Use clear language and design, as well as accessibility best practices and standards, to make it easier to navigate state agency websites and access resources and information.

Strategy 3.2

Build a culture throughout the early childhood care and education system that respects and strengthens family voice.

- 
3.2.1 Respond to the cultural, ethnic, racial, language, and socioeconomic characteristics and preferences of families to create equitable family engagement opportunities at the state level.
- 
3.2.2 Promote the Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards⁴⁷ for Early Childhood as a framework in developing family-friendly programs, policies, and practices. Provide training on how to implement the standards in a variety of early childhood care and education settings, including family child care, so that programs can complete self-assessments, collect data on family engagement, and use data to inform action.
- 
3.2.3 Use family engagement initiatives such as the Kansas Family Advisory Team, Parent Leadership Advisory Council, Head Start Policy Councils and Parent Committees, and the annual Parent Leadership Conference⁴⁸ to strengthen family voices in leadership, including but not limited to gaining insights into child development and the family's role in supporting development and learning, reviewing proposed policies, and informing programs.
- 
3.2.4 Identify and replicate effective family engagement strategies from across Kansas, including compensation for families, engaging family representatives as members of statewide task forces and advisory boards, and as participants in the planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of programs.



What Will Success Look Like?

- Kansas families will have equitable access to resources, tools, and information that enables meaningful engagement with policymakers, state agencies, and other stakeholders.
- Kansans will understand the importance of brain development in early childhood and the benefits of high-quality early environments and conditions that lead to safe, stable, and nurturing relationships.
- Early childhood care and education family leadership opportunities will be easily accessible and available online.
- Kansas early childhood care and education providers will use the Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood to guide their work with families.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
To what extent do families have access to information on quality early childhood programs and services?	<p>Number of families receiving and utilizing public awareness campaign materials (emails, social media, in-person, and web-based metrics)</p> <p>Number of individuals accessing the Kansas Quality Network website</p>
To what extent do families find early childhood information and resources easy to access, understand or interpret, and utilize?	Family member qualitative feedback and stories related to accessing and understanding early childhood care and education information and resources
In what ways are family representatives elevated and utilized in the early childhood care and education system?	Number of families participating in family engagement and leadership initiatives, and type of engagement activity and leadership initiative
Are families participating in peer-to-peer support programs?	Number of family members participating in peer-to-peer networks such as Supporting You



GOAL 4

Private Sector Collaboration

Outcome Statement: Kansas is a champion of public-private collaboration and creates opportunities to invest in the future of Kansas kids and families.

Kansans told us there is a need for greater involvement and investment in the early childhood care and education system. Private sector collaboration and family-friendly workplace practices can have a profound impact on the lives of Kansas children.

We recognize that our shared future prosperity is rooted in early childhood. We envision a state where businesses, philanthropies, and nonprofits alike understand the importance of investing early to build healthy, thriving communities. As employers of parents and caregivers, private sector partners will maintain a competitive edge by committing to innovative, family-friendly practices.

Key Findings



Accessibility



Availability



Systems Alignment



Strategy 4.1

Promote and formalize agreements between public and private sectors to generate financial support for this strategic plan.

- 
4.1.1 Explore public-private partnership models around the country and identify elements that reflect Kansas values and priorities.
- 
4.1.2 Equip business leaders with information demonstrating the impact of supporting safe, stable, nurturing relationships in early childhood.
- 
4.1.3 Connect local government officials, nonprofit leaders, chambers of commerce, the economic development community, and business leaders with opportunities to support families, such as wage support and scholarships for early childhood care and education professionals, expanded broadband access, and community service tax credits.

Strategy 4.2

Promote family-friendly workplaces throughout the public and private sectors.

- 
4.2.1 Identify and leverage resources, programs, and policies that bolster efforts to create family-friendly workplaces in Kansas.
- 
4.2.2 Partner with employers to create family-friendly workplaces in Kansas.
- 
4.2.3 Build commitment to create conditions that lead to safety, stability, and nurturing relationships.



What Will Success Look Like?

- Kansas will establish and operate a statewide public-private partnership that supports early childhood care and education.
- Kansas business leaders, local government officials, nonprofit leaders, chambers of commerce, and members of the broader economic development community will consider themselves early childhood stakeholders and will understand issues impacting children and families.
- Kansas businesses will be committed to implementing family-friendly workplace policies.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
<p>To what extent have private investments in Kansas early childhood care and education programs and services increased?</p>	<p>Overall amount and percent of private investments relative to the Children’s Budget</p> <p>Type and percent of early childhood care and education services funded by private investments, relative to all early childhood care and education investments</p>
<p>What outreach has been done to local government officials, nonprofit leaders, chambers of commerce, the economic development community, and business leaders to support understanding of early childhood care and education needs?</p>	<p>Type and number of outreach activities, as indicated by Kansas Power of the Positive measures⁴⁹, to private sector partners</p>
<p>To what extent are Kansas businesses family-friendly?</p>	<p>Number of businesses that have earned Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition Gold, Silver, and Bronze level Breastfeeding Employee Support Awards</p> <p>Number of businesses participating in the Kids Are Good Business survey and the number that have a plan for improvement of selected family-friendly workplace conditions</p> <p>Flexible work schedule, stronger family bonds, and comprehensive employee wellness measures from the Kansas Power of the Positive Workplace Indicator Dashboard</p>



GOAL 5

Capacity and Access

Outcome Statement: Kansas families have their basic needs met and have equitable access to quality early childhood care and education services.

Kansans told us that the experiences of children and families differ based on the community in which they reside: geography matters. Many children are growing up in families struggling to meet basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, health, and safety.

We recognize that these disparities and disruptions impact how families interact with the early childhood care and education system. We envision Kansas communities that 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.

Key Findings



Accessibility



Availability



Facilities



Systems Alignment



Strategy 5.1

Support initiatives and policies that contribute to economic security for families.

- 

5.1.1 Adopt policies that maximize Medicaid by expanding covered/billable services for children and families, the types of providers who qualify for reimbursement, and the settings where services can be provided.
- 

5.1.2 Reduce eligibility barriers and administrative burdens so that more Kansas families can access concrete economic supports like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food assistance, and child care assistance.
- 


5.1.3 Analyze the impact of current and future policies on funding, services, and programs specifically for underserved populations to help families improve access to basic supports.

Strategy 5.2

Increase capacity and equitable access to early childhood care and education programs and services through policy and administrative directives.

- 


5.2.1 Use the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel and other early childhood governance groups to identify and address laws, policies, funding requirements, practices, ordinances, and regulations that hinder access, availability, and community flexibility.
- 


5.2.2 Analyze eligibility requirements, including work and family income levels, of state-funded early childhood care and education services in coordination with Head Start and Early Head Start to maximize resources and ensure equitable access for families.
- 

5.2.3 Identify state matching funds to draw down all federal funds for child care.
- 
5.2.4 Use early childhood care and education state agency-issued requests for proposals to promote equitable access to services.
- 


5.2.5 Ensure adequate, equitable services for children with, or at risk of, developmental delays.
- 


5.2.6 Develop recommendations to expand promising and evidence-based home visiting models, and support a statewide home visiting infrastructure with a variety of sustainable home visiting service options that meet the needs of families and communities.

Strategy 5.3

Build community capacity for providing high-quality early childhood care and education programs and services.

- 

5.3.1 Explore use of microloans, loan guarantees, credit enhancement programs, and tax incentives to address access to capital to enhance early childhood care and education capacity.

- 
5.3.2 Target investments in high-quality, affordable child care options to expand capacity for families with nontraditional work schedules, infants, and/or children with special health care needs⁵⁰.
- 
5.3.3 Promote mixed-media resources on topics specific to child care business development and entrepreneurship.
- 
5.3.4 Encourage partnerships for a cooperative model for child care services that meets the unique needs of rural and family child care.
- 
5.3.5 Provide technical assistance to school districts to expand inclusive community preschool capacity without reducing overall community early childhood care and education capacity.
- 
5.3.6 Explore options to fund early childhood special education to incentivize inclusive preschool programming, including a review of Kansas Special Education Categorical Aid.

Strategy 5.4

Support communities, educational environments, families, and children to ensure that each child entering kindergarten at age five is socially, emotionally, and academically prepared.

- 
5.4.1 Provide information to families and technical assistance to school systems to increase the number of students who participate in the Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot (the Ages and Stages Questionnaires).
- 
5.4.2 Build community partnerships between elementary schools and early childhood care and education providers to ensure smooth transitions to Pre-K and kindergarten.
- 
5.4.3 Inform families and community-based organizations about the importance of transitions, and help families develop transition plans to ensure they receive needed services during times of change, including but not limited to age-related transitions, changes in conditions, and/or geographic moves.

What Will Success Look Like?

-  Kansas will analyze the impact of policies on services for underserved populations and actively make recommendations that ensure equitable access.
-  Kansas will maximize Medicaid billing codes to foster children's social-emotional development.
-  The Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel will review policies, ordinances, and practices to make decisions and elevate recommendations to support children and families.
-  Universal home visiting will be expanded statewide.
-  Kansas communities will explore and adopt child care co-op models that meet the unique needs of their families and providers.
-  Kansas will fund inclusive preschool programming, and the requirements for state-funded preschool programs will be aligned yet flexible to allow for diverse funding sources.
-  Kansas early childhood care and education providers will actively and routinely engage in transition planning with families during times of change.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
To what extent are families accessing needed services through Medicaid?	<p>Number and type of Medicaid service provided to families</p> <p>Number of children covered by Medicaid</p>
To what extent are eligibility barriers and administrative burdens reduced to help families access concrete economic supports?	<p>Number of families, children, and/or households that access Temporary Assistance for Needy Families cash assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program food assistance, and child care assistance</p> <p>Qualitative feedback from families on their ability to access needed supports through stories and/or surveys</p> <p>Number of substantiated cases of child maltreatment</p>
To what extent does state early childhood care and education funding increase equitable access?	Demographics of families receiving services
To what extent does state early childhood care and education funding increase capacity?	<p>Number of unduplicated children receiving early childhood care and education services</p> <p>Total available slots for early childhood care and education services and programs across Kansas</p> <p>Overall number and amount of state matching fund opportunities identified and maximized</p>
To what extent do innovative funding mechanisms enhance child care capacity?	<p>Overall amount and percent directed to child care capacity relative to other early childhood care and education services from microloans, loan guarantees, credit enhancement programs, and tax incentives</p> <p>Overall amount of targeted investments for child care options for families with nontraditional work hours, infants, and children with special health care needs</p>
To what extent are communities and educational environments supported so their young children are prepared for kindergarten at age five?	<p>Number of schools that receive technical assistance to expand inclusive community preschool capacity</p> <p>Number of Kindergarten in Kansas booklets distributed and in what languages these are available and distributed</p>
To what extent are transitions smooth between early childhood care, Pre-K, and kindergarten?	<p>Number of kindergarten children participating in Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot</p> <p>Number of partnerships established between early childhood care and education programs and elementary schools</p>



GOAL 6

Workforce

Outcome Statement: Kansas leads the way in developing, supporting, and valuing early childhood professionals.

Kansans told us there is an urgent need for better compensation, benefits, and training for the early childhood workforce. Kansas is one of only 10 states without a workforce registry, which would offer early childhood professionals a place to document their development and quality improvement accomplishments.

We found unnecessary fragmentation across organizations, providers, and disciplines contributing to the early childhood workforce. We envision a cohesive system that recruits, retains, and advances a diverse workforce that is prepared and qualified to meet the changing needs of young children and families. Professionals will feel respected and valued, and they will have the resources they need to deliver high-quality services to children and families.

Key Findings

 Accessibility	
	
 Workforce	 Systems Alignment
	

Strategy 6.1

Expand the number of professionals entering and remaining in the workforce.

- 

6.1.1 Develop recommendations to increase compensation and benefits for early childhood care and education professionals.
- 

6.1.2 Develop and implement a comprehensive career pathway to facilitate career entrance and advancement.
- 


6.1.3 Expand opportunities for early childhood care and education career exploration at the high school level, including effective promotion and understanding of all positions and leadership opportunities.
- 

6.1.4 Launch a workforce registry for early childhood care and education professionals to access, track, and guide career advancement.
- 


6.1.5 Document and address recruitment and retention challenges.
- 


6.1.6 Engage pre-service faculty and in-service professionals in identifying challenges for training program development and expansion. Make adjustments to address demands in workforce recruitment, preparation, and retention.

Strategy 6.2

Implement a high-quality, competency-based professional development⁵¹ system.

- 

6.2.1 Establish a comprehensive professional development system that includes diverse representation from across the early childhood care and education workforce.
- 

6.2.2 Revise, as appropriate, and align core competencies and the development of credentials across all early childhood care and education positions, drawing from national evidence-based practices and standards. Ensure they include knowledge and performance competencies that prepare professionals to support all children at all levels of ability.
- 

6.2.3 Engage two- and four-year institutions of higher education in the development of articulation agreements supporting transfer of early childhood major courses to create additional degree advancement opportunities for early childhood care and education professionals.
- 
6.2.4 Coordinate the activities of professional development contracts across state agencies to realize efficiencies, ensure effectiveness, and identify key investment areas.
- 


6.2.5 Select, promote, and provide training, mentorship, coaching⁵², and support to integrate best and/or evidence-based practices into service delivery. Ensure key topics like trauma-informed care, early childhood mental health, early literacy, and cultural responsiveness are addressed.
- 


6.2.6 Identify gaps in awareness of, access to, and availability of professional development opportunities, including evidence-based practices, early childhood credentials and credentialing opportunities, and quality initiatives and programs. Develop plans to effectively and efficiently address those gaps for all early childhood care and education roles.
- 


6.2.7 Identify strategies to create and promote joint participation in professional development activities across settings and roles, including opportunities for school-based and non-school-based early childhood care and education professionals.

Strategy 6.3

Support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the early childhood care and education workforce.

-   **6.3.1** Establish financial incentives to support the recruitment, retention, and advancement of a diverse workforce.
-    **6.3.2** Support culturally, linguistically, and diverse-ability-appropriate materials in professional development opportunities, facilities, playgrounds, and other learning spaces.
-    **6.3.3** Implement professional development programs that increase workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion practices to ensure early childhood environments are responsive to and supportive of a diverse workforce.



What Will Success Look Like?

- Kansas will employ an early childhood care and education workforce that is highly valued, fairly compensated, and well-trained, and represents the diversity of Kansas children and families.
- Kansas state agencies will ensure effectiveness and fund key areas of professional development across the state through an aligned approach to contracts.
- The Kansas early childhood care and education workforce will have clear and updated career pathways that acknowledge multiple entry points or on-ramps, and include connections to the high school level and two- and four-year institutions of higher education.
- Kansas will regularly research, document, and address early childhood care and education workforce recruitment and retention challenges.
- Kansas early childhood care and education programs will be guided by quality indicators and standards that include culturally and linguistically appropriate information.
- Kansas will have a process in place to select, promote, and provide training, coaching, mentorship, and support to integrate best and/or evidence-based practices into service delivery for early childhood care and education professionals.
- Kansas will establish and operate an early childhood care and education workforce registry.
- The Kansas early childhood care and education workforce will be guided by an aligned and updated set of core competencies that prepares them to implement developmentally appropriate, responsive, and inclusive care.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
To what extent do compensation and benefits increase for early childhood care and education professionals?	Overall change in average wages and benefits for early childhood care and education professionals
To what extent are early childhood care and education professionals entering and remaining in the early childhood care and education workforce?	Number and demographic information of professionals entering and remaining in the early childhood care and education workforce Satisfaction survey results
Are career pathways clearly defined, with articulation agreements across institutions, and is early childhood care and education promoted as a viable profession at the high school level?	Number of articulation agreements between two- and four-year institutions of higher education that result in additional degree advancement opportunities Percent of high schools with early childhood care and education career pathways
To what extent do early childhood care and education professionals increase their knowledge and integration of professional development opportunities, including evidence-based practices, early childhood credentials and credentialing opportunities, and quality initiatives and programs?	Number and percent of early childhood care and education professionals accessing training, coaching, and support Number and type of coaching, professional development, and formal education opportunities that early childhood care and education professionals access and complete



GOAL 7

Quality and Environments

Outcome Statement: Kansas early childhood care and education programs and environments are high-quality, safe, and nurturing.

Kansans told us there are limited resources to support new facilities, capital improvements, and development of additional, high-quality learning materials. Kansas also lacks complete data regarding construction and renovation needs.

We recognize that investments in physical infrastructure will ensure all children have access to safe, stable, and nurturing environments where high-quality services can be equitably delivered. We envision environments where every child can thrive.

Key Findings



Accessibility



Collaboration



Workforce



Systems Alignment



Facilities



Strategy 7.1

Make physical infrastructure improvements to ensure healthy and safe environments for children to grow and learn.

- 
7.1.1 Prioritize investments in quality improvement grants to help licensed child care programs address environmental and material upgrades, with particular focus given to supporting the needs of underserved children.
- 
7.1.2 Study local zoning and homeowner associations across the state to identify laws that adversely affect the ability to operate a child care business in residential and commercial spaces.

Strategy 7.2

Improve the quality of early childhood care and education programs, services, and physical environments through equitable, community-based approaches.

- 
7.2.1 Identify and align core quality standards that reflect culturally responsive best practices for early learning across settings, such as Head Start Performance Standards, National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation, National Association for Family Child Care Accreditation, and Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices.
- 
7.2.2 Expand Links to Quality⁵³ statewide to promote continuous quality improvement and support peer learning communities within child care environments.
- 
7.2.3 Update and disseminate the Kansas Early Learning Standards, with the updates to include the use of technology in early childhood care and education settings and the benefits of multiple languages in early settings.
- 
7.2.4 Disseminate the Kansas Prekindergarten Guide and the Kansas Full-Day Kindergarten Guide to teachers and administrators, and provide professional development to programs to implement the guidelines.
- 
7.2.5 Support expansion of early childhood care and education consultants, including in-service training, child care health consultants (physical, oral health, nutrition, physical activity), and early childhood mental health.



What Will Success Look Like?

- Kansas will ensure that early childhood care and education programs, services, and environments are high-quality and provide safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments for children.
- Kansas will have a statewide Quality Recognition and Improvement System (Links to Quality).
- Kansas will identify and address barriers to local zoning and homeowner association regulations to support the operation of high-quality licensed child care businesses in residential and commercial spaces.

Indicators of Success	Measures of Success
To what extent are physical improvements made to create high-quality, safe, and healthy early childhood environments?	Overall funding identified and allocated for physical improvements to early childhood environments
Are early childhood care and education programs, services, and physical environments high-quality?	Number of child care programs and environments implementing Links to Quality standards Number of early childhood care and education settings utilizing updated Kansas Early Learning Standards Number of education settings utilizing the Kansas Prekindergarten and Kansas Full-Day Kindergarten Guides
To what extent are community-based, equitable approaches utilized for early childhood care and education quality improvements?	Qualitative feedback and stories from families related to culturally responsive, community-based approaches to quality improvements in the system



IMPLEMENTATION

The Plan in Action

- Children's Cabinet Leads the Charge
- Governance Structure
- Changemakers and Champions
- Resources to Support and Sustain This Journey
- Timeline

Children’s Cabinet Leads the Charge

The collaborative spirit that moved us along our journey of fact finding and planning in recent months continues to drive us today as we initiate a new governance structure and get to work. The governor recognized the statutory role of the Children’s Cabinet as the coordinator of our state’s early childhood care and education system and, in early 2020, designated it as the Kansas Early Childhood Advisory Council⁵⁴. The Children’s Cabinet is uniquely positioned to fulfill the Advisory Council role and provide oversight for early childhood systems building, including implementation of this strategic plan.

The Children’s Cabinet has existing structures in place to communicate effectively with a wide range of stakeholders, to coordinate policies and programs across funding sources and agencies, and to gather and synthesize input from stakeholders. The Children’s Cabinet Board represents appointments by both the Kansas governor and the Kansas legislature and includes members from key state agencies that support Kansas children and families (Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Department for Children and Families, Kansas Board of Regents, Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Supreme Court, and the Kansas Department of Corrections).

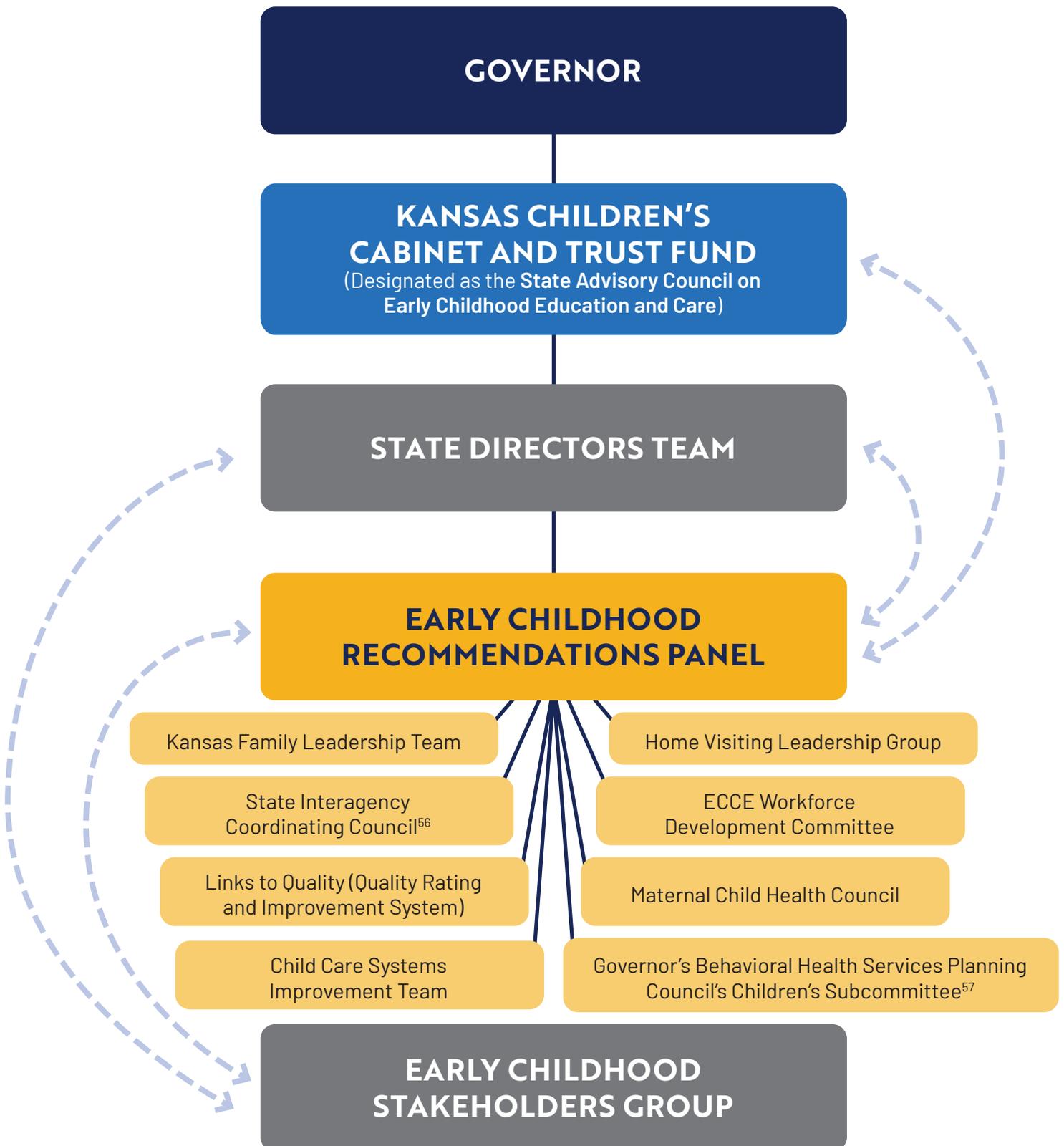
The figure on page 42 shows the governance and decision-making structure to implement this plan. The Children’s Cabinet, now the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, has been deeply involved from the beginning of the needs assessment process through the translation of needs into action for this strategic plan. They will oversee implementation and an annual review process. The Children’s Cabinet and State Directors Team serve as decision-makers, elevating items that need approval by agency leadership, the governor, legislature, or Kansas State Board of Education. The Early Childhood Recommendations Panel and the Early Childhood Stakeholders Group serve as champions for strengthening the early childhood system in their local communities and provide input that includes the perspectives of a wide variety of workgroups, committees, parents, and providers. The governance structure offers a place for those committees established by statute, such as the State Interagency Coordinating Council, and for those developed around an initiative that may be time-limited. This structure clarifies how to elevate both challenges and innovative ideas. The governance approach is designed to be attuned and responsive to the changing needs of Kansas children and families.

As the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, the Children’s Cabinet:

- Convenes a State Directors Team to administer state agency activities in the areas of policy, funding, regulation, and programming.
- Convenes, directs, and appoints members to the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel⁵⁵, an advisory group of volunteers with early childhood expertise whose roles and affiliations are designated by executive order.
- Conducts a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of services for children from birth to age five.
- Creates ongoing opportunities for collaboration and cross-agency participation of those involved in child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services.
- Fosters a public-service culture that recognizes the value of early childhood care and education.



KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



Changemakers and Champions

This plan offers a dynamic, focused, and cohesive structure to continually evolve as more voices are heard across the state. We must actively engage champions and inspire changemakers to carry the work forward. The plan is designed to be both responsive and future-focused.

Ongoing public input will be solicited to help state leaders keep their finger on the pulse, so we can adapt as needed. This will happen through status updates and reviews by the Children’s Cabinet Board, which meets six times annually in meetings that are open to the public in-person and virtually.

Kansas early childhood champions have always been committed to innovation. This plan celebrates that spirit and encourages future-focused thinking by prioritizing internal alignment, emphasizing public-private partnerships, investing in workforce and collaborative data systems, and exploring policy impact. By paying attention to changes in population demographics, investments, and policies that affect families, state leaders can anticipate and communicate both positive and negative influences on the system. **Rather than acting after the fact, Kansas will be poised to be proactive and coordinate efforts across partners and stakeholders.**

We must actively engage champions and inspire changemakers to carry the work forward.

The plan also includes structures to continually inform the process and create protected space for trying new ideas without disrupting existing reporting structures and workflows. This includes the Early Childhood Stakeholders Group, which is open to any interested Kansas early childhood stakeholder and convenes following the Children’s Cabinet meeting, and the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel, which meets monthly. Both will routinely monitor plan progress and generate new ideas to address challenges or changing environments.

We will continue our ongoing communication efforts, including webinars, weekly emails, social media, and online share forms. These channels offer a platform for all Kansans to be informed, ask questions, elevate challenges, and celebrate Bright Spots.



Resources to Support and Sustain This Journey

Achieving the vision of *every child thrives* requires significant resources and broad-based support from both public and private sources. Intense engagement is necessary to bolster investments and immediately put those resources to work.

Looking inward, we will audit program requirements that stifle collaboration and restrict us from maximizing funds. We will make recommendations for policy and practice changes to eliminate barriers. We will identify opportunities for alignment to reduce duplication across funding streams.

Looking outward, we will seek ways to increase business involvement and help establish and promote public-private partnerships. We are already exploring ways to create a state public-private partnership endowment that could serve as an incubator for new ideas.

We are committed to making data-informed decisions about the most effective and impactful strategies, using our available resources wisely, and redirecting resources when it makes sense – in response to new findings or evaluation outcomes.

Specific examples of financial resources in place to support this work include:

- 1-800-CHILDREN (the state-level centralized access point), developmental screenings, staff support for the State Interagency Coordinating Council and local councils, and the Kansas Family Leadership Team⁵⁸ are supported by coordinated funding from state agencies.
- Care coordination and developmental screenings are funded through Medicaid reimbursement, Title V Maternal and Child Health, the Kansas State Department of Education, and Children's Cabinet early childhood funding.
- In June 2019, the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that the school funding system approved by the Kansas Legislature and governor is constitutionally equitable and adequate, ending a decade of school finance litigation. The new formula increases funding available to schools to invest in early childhood programming.
- The workforce registry will be developed and maintained through a coordinated effort, led by the Children's Cabinet, and including Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) and Title V Maternal and Child Health funds, and Child Care Development Funds.
- Significant investments will be made to develop data systems and establish the governance for an early childhood integrated data system. The Children's Cabinet, in partnership with contributing agencies, will help coordinate funds to support this work.

Timeline

This is a five-year plan, effective April 2020 through December 2024. Specific work plans and action steps, as they take shape from various community groups, coalitions, and agency work groups, may be on accelerated or phased timelines. Some strategies and tactics may rely on others to happen first, or may hinge on decisions made by local or state government.

This plan is ambitious and future-focused, but it is also fueled by work that has already begun. We will formally review the plan annually and update it as necessary to respond to changing environments, resources, and results. In practice, updates to specific strategies and tactics will likely happen more frequently because the plan must be responsive to be effective. We must adapt and adjust in response to evolving circumstances. Our guiding principles will ground us. Ongoing stakeholder input and engagement will guide our way. We know that there is no time to lose, and we must continue to harness momentum, champion the importance of early childhood, and seize the day to make meaningful and lasting change.



Conclusion

The children born in 2019 – when this work began in earnest – already have had millions of experiences and are rapidly building the brain architecture to take them through the school years and into adulthood. We developed this plan for them and their families.

A child born today will be entering kindergarten in five years. That child deserves to have their most basic needs met and have opportunities, no matter where they live in Kansas, to experience high-quality early care and education so they can enter kindergarten at age five socially, emotionally, and academically prepared for success. Our **All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** will help make that vision a reality.

The All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan creates the infrastructure that our current system has been lacking. We are leveraging the investment and momentum of our Preschool Development Birth through Five Planning Grant to secure new resources and support. We have already started to do things differently and have plans to make changes in funding, data, and policy. **The result will be a system that transforms the way we deliver services, ensuring that every child thrives in Kansas.**



Thank You to Our Contributors

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ENDNOTES

- 1 **Quality** – Quality early care and education provides a safe, stable, and nurturing environment where every child can thrive.
- 2 Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. (n.d.). Toxic Stress. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress>
- 3 Society for Research in Child Development. (2013, October). Investing in *Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education*. <https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2016/04/Evidence-Base-on-Preschool-Education-FINAL.pdf>
- 4 Beckmann, Katherine A. (2017). Mitigating Adverse Childhood Experiences Through Investments in Early Childhood Programs. *Academic Pediatrics*, Volume 17, Issue 7, S28-S29. [https://www.academicpediatrics.net/article/S1876-2859\(16\)30420-X/fulltext](https://www.academicpediatrics.net/article/S1876-2859(16)30420-X/fulltext)
- 5 K.S.A. § 38-2101(1999).
- 6 K.S.A. § 38-1901(1999)
- 7 **Early Childhood Care and Education System** – The Kansas early childhood care and education system is a system of coordinated and comprehensive supports and core services that support healthy development, strong families, and early learning. Core services include early care and education, home visiting, parent education, maternal child health programs, and services, supports, and infrastructure where the child age birth through five is the primary recipient.
- 8 Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health. (2020, January). *Early Childhood Systems*. <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/earlychildhoodcomprehensivesystems>
- 9 Kansas Department of Health and Environment. (n.d.). *Lexie’s Law, Effective July 1, 2010*. http://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/lexies_law.htm
- 10 K.S.A. § 65-528 (1994).
- 11 Kansas State Board of Education. (n.d.). Board Vision for Kansas Education. <https://www.ksde.org/Board/Kansas-State-Board-of-Education/Board-Goals-and-Outcomes>
- 12 **State Directors Team** – The State Directors Team comprises of the directors leading the early childhood efforts from the Kansas State Department of Education, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, the Kansas Department for Children and Families, and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. Collectively, these agencies provide leadership for the programs across the Kansas early childhood care and education system. This team meets every two weeks and makes key decisions, provides clear direction, tracks benchmarks and progress, generates pathways for statewide collaboration, ensures consistent communication and messaging, and develops solutions for challenges that arise.
- 13 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January). *Needs Assessment*. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment>
- 14 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Care. (2018, August 23). *Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Grant Competition*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/pdg-b-5-initiative>
- 15 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January). *Needs Assessment*. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment>
- 16 Department of Health and Human Services (2019). *Health Resources and Service Administration Data Warehouse, Health Workforce Shortage Areas*. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>
- 17 Department of Health and Human Services (2019). *Health Resources and Service Administration Data Warehouse, Health Workforce Shortage Areas*. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>
- 18 United States Census Bureau. (2017). *American Community Survey – 1 Year Estimates*. <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>
- 19 Child Trends & Zero to Three. (2019). *State of Kansas Babies Yearbook 2019*. https://stateofbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/State-of-Babies-Yearbook_2.25.19.pdf
- 20 Child Trends & Zero to Three. (2019). *State of Kansas Babies Yearbook 2019*. https://stateofbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/State-of-Babies-Yearbook_2.25.19.pdf
- 21 **Broader Early Childhood System (Mixed-Delivery System)** – Multigenerational cross-sector services that support early learning, healthy development, and strong families. This broader system includes economic and employment supports, child protective services, health care, and behavioral health. The system encompasses navigations and intersections between the many sectors to create a comprehensive support system for families.
- 22 Child Trends & Zero to Three. (2019). *State of Kansas Babies Yearbook 2019*. https://stateofbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/State-of-Babies-Yearbook_2.25.19.pdf
- 23 **Underserved (and vulnerable)** – Children who experience barriers or challenges to accessing or engaging in high-quality early childhood care and education services for a range of reasons, including but not limited to: low household income or economic instability, homelessness, trauma, parental incarceration, foster care risk or placement, special health care and developmental needs, or migrancy. Children from rural environments, tribal populations, and infants and toddlers are also considered underserved for this Strategic Plan.
- 24 **Child Care Desert** – A census tract with more than 50 children under age five that contains either no child care providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed child care slots.
- 25 Center for American Progress. (2017). *Do You Live in a Child Care Desert?* [Kansas Data Set]. <https://childcaredeserts.org/?state=KS>
- 26 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January). *Needs Assessment*. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment> (2020)
- 27 Kansas Department of Health and Environment. (2019). *Kansas Part C Needs Assessment*. <http://www.kdheks.gov/its/download/PartCNeedsAssessment.pdf>
- 28 **Workforce** – The early childhood education workforce includes those working with young children (infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children in centers, homes, and schools) and their families or on their behalf (in agencies, organizations, institutions of higher education, etc.), with a primary mission of supporting children’s development and learning.

- 29 Center for the Study of Child Care Employment. (2018, June 27). Early Childhood Workforce Index. <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/early-childhood-workforce-2018-index>
- 30 Child Care Aware of Kansas and Kansas Department for Children & Families. (2018). *Child Care Supply Demand Report*. <https://ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/SupplyDemand2018Final.pdf>
- 31 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January). *Needs Assessment*. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment>
- 32 Child Care Aware of Kansas and Kansas Department for Children & Families. (2018). *Child Care Supply Demand Report*. <https://ks.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/SupplyDemand2018Final.pdf>
- 33 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January). *Needs Assessment*. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment>
- 34 **Bright Spots** – Programs, partnerships, and innovations to celebrate throughout our state. Kansans shared Bright Spots through individual stories, and through community, partner, and stakeholder discussions. Bright Spots exist in all regions and indicate that Kansas is full of resilient families and communities who are striving to create the best possible circumstances for young children to thrive.
- 35 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2019, December). *Blueprint for Early Childhood*. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/blueprint-for-early-childhood>
- 36 **Mixed-Delivery System** – See Broader Early Childhood System.
- 37 Early Childhood Systems-Building webinars: https://zoom.us/join/joinMeeting/register/tJULc-CopjMqOnOMEpp_x65uZ7jbyq4Q-w
- 38 **Equity/Equitable Access/Diversity** – Equity is the proportional distribution of resources and outcomes across groups based on existing and differential levels of access and opportunity. Equity is not the same as equality; while equality asks us to disburse resources evenly regardless of social, cultural, and/or historical barriers, equity requires recognition that individuals and families from certain marginalized groups require more resources, supports, and attention to achieve the same outcomes as their peers from dominant social or cultural groups. We acknowledge diversity in our work as a range of community and individual experiences, situations, and identities, and we work to address equitable access with regard to: resources and services, language differences and literacy barriers, housing access and economic distress, access to basic needs, cultural and social isolation, physical and attitudinal barriers, education opportunities, and discrimination on the basis of race, appearance, age, ethnicity, immigrant status, religious background, sexual orientation, gender identity, or ability.
- 39 **Technical Assistance** – Technical Assistance is the provision of targeted and customized aid to develop or strengthen processes, knowledge application, or implementation of services by a professional(s) with subject matter expertise and skills in adult learning practices.
- 40 **Common Application** – Early childhood care and education Common Application Pilot (Common App) will enable 501(c)(3)s, local governments, and unified school districts to apply to multiple funding opportunities through a streamlined process.
- 41 **Centralized Access Point** – The Centralized Access Point (CAP) at the state level is the 1-800-CHILDREN resource. It provides information to families and providers about child development and community-based services. CAP staff act as initial care coordinators, assessing parent concerns, walking parents through available resources, and empowering them to choose the services they want.
- 42 **Aunt Bertha** – Aunt Bertha provides a comprehensive state and local resource guide. Aunt Bertha staff (out of state) continually vet and update resources (48-hour guarantee to verify a program), ensuring an extensive statewide (and national) resource directory that helps families find resources.
- 43 **Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS)** – IRIS is a web-based communication tool for referrals that can be customized to include any partner from across the broader early childhood system. IRIS reflects the multisector partners of the local community. Communities customize referral forms to meet local needs. Partners track each independent referral for families in a community and can clearly identify where a family is in the process with another partner. IRIS also allows an organization to visibly display their capacity to receive referrals, allowing a community to self-assess which organizations are consistently “full,” where the most referrals are going, which organizations “close the loop” effectively, and how many referrals are successfully completed for families. IRIS provides an easy-to-use system that supports transparent communication, data-driven assessment of IRIS’ effectiveness and partner accountability, and the technology to connect partners regardless of their organizational data systems.
- 44 **Telehealth** – The Health Resources Services Administration defines telehealth as the use of electronic information and telecommunications technologies to support long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, public health, and health administration. Technologies include videoconferencing, the internet, store-and-forward imaging, streaming media, and terrestrial and wireless communications. Telehealth is different from telemedicine because it refers to a broader scope of remote health care services than telemedicine. While telemedicine refers specifically to remote clinical services, telehealth can refer to remote nonclinical services, such as provider training, administrative meetings, and continuing medical education, in addition to clinical services.
- 45 **Data Trust** – The Kansas ECIDS Data Trust Framework will guide the legal, technical, and governance process within and between agencies and organizations that are early childhood data stewards. The Data Trust outlines roles, responsibilities, regulations, and structures for governing shared data resources.
- 46 **Care Coordination** – Care coordination models center services around a child and family, and share information among partners for the best possible experience.
- 47 **Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards** – In 2014, the Kansas Parent Information Resource Center led a group to establish family engagement and partnership standards for early childhood care and education providers in Kansas. The Kansas Parent Information Resource Center is currently disseminating recommendations and strategies for each standard.

- 48 **Parent Leadership Conference** – The annual Parent Leadership Conference is a networking and learning opportunity for parents and professionals who work with children. This free event includes breakout sessions, speakers, child care, and more.
- 49 Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas Power of the Positive Coalition and Indicator Dashboard. State of Kansas Child Maltreatment Prevention Plan 2019-2023 (2020). <http://www.kansaspowerofthepositive.org/>
- 50 **Children with Special Health Care Needs** – Children birth to five who require special services due to developmental/intellectual or social-emotional disabilities, sensory or motor impairment, or chronic illness.
- 51 **Professional Development** – Early childhood education professional development is a continuum of learning and support activities designed to prepare individuals for work with and on behalf of young children and their families, as well as ongoing experiences to enhance this work. These opportunities lead to improvements in the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions of early education professionals. Professional development encompasses education, training, and technical assistance.
- 52 **Training/Mentoring/Coaching** – Training is a learning experience, or series of experiences, specific to an area of inquiry and related set of skills or dispositions, delivered by a professional(s) with subject matter and adult learning knowledge and skills. A planned sequence of training sessions comprises a training program. Training is distinct from both Coaching and Mentoring. **Mentoring** is a relationship-based process between colleagues in similar professional roles, with a more-experienced individual with adult learning knowledge and skills, the mentor, providing guidance and example to the less-experienced mentee. **Coaching** is a relationship-based process led by an expert with specialized and adult learning knowledge and skills, who often serves in a different professional role than the recipient(s). Coaching is designed to build capacity for specific professional dispositions, skills, and behaviors and is focused on goal setting and achievement for an individual or group. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies. (2011). Early Childhood Education Professional Development: Training and Technical Assistance Glossary. https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/our-work/public-policy-advocacy/glossarytraining_ta.pdf
- 53 **Links to Quality/QRIS** – A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is an approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education settings. In Kansas, our QRIS is called Links to Quality. Links to Quality is a child care quality recognition and improvement system created with the support of early childhood organizations across the state and led by the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF).
- 54 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January). *Executive Order*. https://kschildrenscabinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EO-20-02_Executed1.pdf
- 55 **Early Childhood Recommendations Panel** – The Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel meets monthly and provides vision and guidance on early childhood programs and services to the Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, which is the designated Early Childhood Advisory Council (Executive Order 20-02). Through their technical expertise and collaborative efforts, the Panel is a critical component of the governance structure supporting early childhood initiatives in Kansas. This volunteer board receives recommendations from stakeholders and early childhood subcommittees and directs them along the most effective path for resolution or implementation. Membership, appointments, and terms are outlined in the Executive Order and represent the required roles outlined in the Federal Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-134).
- 56 Created in both state and federal law (K.S.A. 74-801 and Public Law 105-17), the Council’s role is to advise and assist in the delivery of services to preschool children (birth through age 5) with special needs.
- 57 Created in both state and federal law (K.S.A. 39-1605 and Public Law 102-321), the Governor’s Behavioral Health Services Planning Council partners to promote prevention, treatment, and recovery services to ensure Kansans with behavioral health needs live safe, healthy, successful, and self-determined lives in their communities. Each of its subcommittees generates recommendations regarding the Kansas mental health system.
- 58 **Kansas Family Leadership Team** – The Kansas Family Leadership Team (FLT) will unify parent voice, diversify representation, and maximize influence in the decision-making process. The FLT will be represented on the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel to inform decisions and improve programs based on parent experiences and choices.

All In For  Kansas Kids

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