

# Needs Assessment At-A-Glance

---

Kansas is the best place to raise a child. This vision has led our early childhood system over the past 15 years and provides the foundation for the Kansas Early Childhood Needs Assessment, a component of the federal Preschool Development Grant awarded to Kansas in December 2018. The full Needs Assessment was published in January 2020 and can be found on the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund website. This Needs Assessment At-A-Glance summarizes our efforts.

## Needs Assessment Key Findings Summary

The Needs Assessment represents a comprehensive view of our early childhood care and education system. We can describe our birth through five population and the programs and services available across the state. We can point to promising and effective strategies for navigating a comprehensive early childhood system and for transitioning to the K-12 education system. We can identify resources to support our system infrastructure and a workforce comprising committed, dedicated professionals. We have a strong understanding of the importance of shared data and aligning around a collective vision.

Importantly, we recognize the gaps that exist and the strides we need to take to strengthen our early childhood care and education system. We need to increase data sharing efforts to support informed decision-making around underserved populations and issues of inequity and to understand where to invest for greater accessibility and availability. We need to intentionally align and maximize infrastructure, resources, and funding. We need to support and strengthen our committed workforce, sustain our facilities and environments, strengthen connections within communities, and eliminate navigation barriers for families.

**Two central messages emerged from the results of our data collection, analysis, and synthesis:**

1. 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.
2. 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.

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



Accessibility



Availability



Navigation



Workforce



Facilities



Collaboration



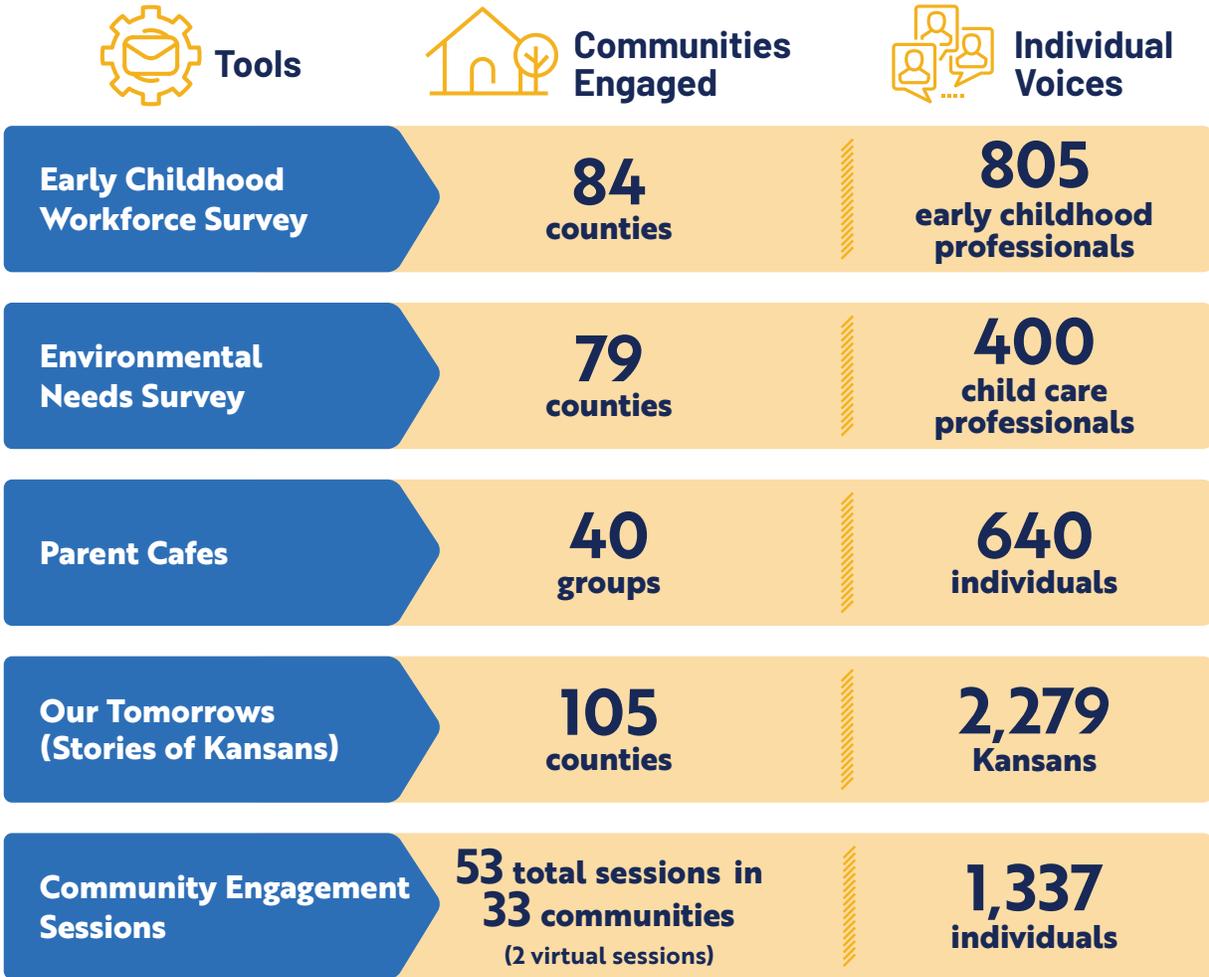
Systems Alignment



Bright Spots

## Engagement Reach

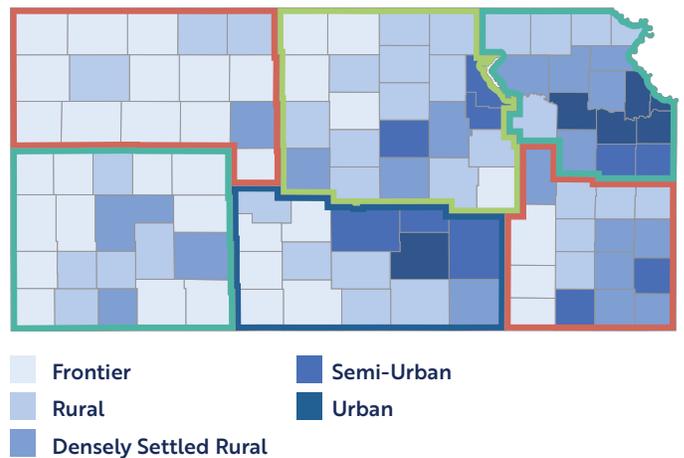
During 2019, we set out to understand the current early childhood care and education landscape by considering the stories and experiences of Kansas children and families, the current status of Kansas early childhood care and education programs and services, and the infrastructure. More than 6,100 Kansans from each of our 105 counties contributed to this work. We were intentional about hearing directly from parents and caregivers, family members, providers, and leaders in early childhood care and education programs. We were also intentional about the ways we gathered information, from in-person meetings such as Parent Cafés and Facilitated Visioning sessions, to online offerings like our workforce and environmental needs surveys, story collection efforts, and an online share form.



Additional input shared through webinars, an online share form, and early childhood stakeholder meetings and events contributed to the total of over 6,100 Kansans (duplicated count) who shaped the Needs Assessment document.

## Regional Differences

While there are many common accessibility and availability threads throughout the state, regions and communities affect how families experience services. The full Needs Assessment includes regional summaries to help convey how resource scarcity, race and ethnicity, and income inequity impact Kansas families and young children.





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

Geography, awareness, eligibility, fear, and costs contribute to the inequities. Proximity to the location of services as well as geographic distribution of services impacts ease of access. Families with young children often remain unaware of the services that are available to them until a family emergency or crisis necessitates initial access. Limiting and conflicting eligibility criteria adds an extra layer of challenge to understanding and identifying appropriate services.

For single Kansas parents of infants and toddlers, child care costs **48.7% of total income**.<sup>1</sup>

**49%** of Kansas families with children younger than age six **qualify** for home visiting services, but in 2017, **only 9%** received home visiting services.<sup>2</sup>

**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).<sup>3</sup>



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

Gaps exist across the early childhood system but are concentrated in a few key areas: parenting skills, basic and economic supports, child care, crisis services, and health care. Parents and caregivers lack sufficient support to gain the skills and resources they need to nurture the healthy development of their children, and meet their families' basic needs. Child care is a significant need, especially infant care, care during nontraditional hours, and care for children with special needs. More behavioral and mental health services are needed, including trauma-informed services. Families facing the disruptions caused by foster care, substance abuse, homelessness, and incarceration need additional support.

**23%** of Kansas households with infants and toddlers have low or very low food security.<sup>4</sup>

61 counties—**more than half the state**—are designated **Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas**.<sup>5</sup>

**70%** of licensed, board certified psychiatrists are located in **5 counties** (Johnson, Douglas, Wyandotte, Shawnee, and Riley).<sup>6</sup>



**44%** of Kansans live in a **child care desert**, which particularly impacts rural (45%), low-income (63%), and Latino populations (60%).<sup>7</sup>

1 Child Trends & Zero to Three, State of Kansas Babies, Yearbook 2019  
2 Child Trends & Zero to Three, State of Kansas Babies, Yearbook 2019  
3 United States Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey - 1 Year Estimates  
4 Child Trends & Zero to Three, State of Kansas Babies, Yearbook 2019  
5 Department of Health and Human Services (2019), Health Resources and Service Administration Data Warehouse, Health Workforce Shortage Areas.  
6 Kansas Health Foundation (2018), 2018 Data Book  
7 Center for American Progress, Do You Live in a Child Care Desert? [Kansas Data Set], 2017



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

Transition gaps occur at multiple levels across services and programs, requiring families to “connect the dots” within the early childhood care and education system, between sectors, and into kindergarten. Continuous engagement in early childhood care and education services requires significant problem-solving by families already in crisis, placing an additional burden on them. Common disruptors exist around transportation, cultural and linguistic barriers, health care, geography, cost, and crises.

**No formal** early childhood care and education to kindergarten transition processes or practices exist at the state level.

**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).<sup>8</sup>**



## Workforce: 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.

Specific challenges for those who care for Kansas children include diminishing numbers in the workforce, lack of credentials and opportunities to gain credentials, lack of respect and value, and professional development driven by regulations and availability. There is an urgent need for better compensation, benefits, and training for the early childhood workforce.

Kansas is **one** of **only ten** states **without** an early childhood workforce registry.<sup>9</sup>

**15%** of child care center employees receive **no benefit plan** for full-time work.<sup>10</sup>

### Median Wage Comparison

Child care worker in Kansas

 **\$9.25/hour**

Elementary school teacher in Kansas

 **\$26.91/hour<sup>11</sup>**

8 Kansas Department of Health and Environment, (2019). Kansas Part C Needs Assessment

9 Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, (2020, January), Needs Assessment

10 Child Care Aware of Kansas (2018), Who Cares for Kansas Children? 2018 Kansas child care workforce study and state child profile

11 Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Early Childhood Workforce Index, 2018



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

There is limited funding and funding flexibility for providers to make capital improvements, despite the importance of physical infrastructure to the safety of children and staff. Additional learning materials and enhancements to environments are also needed to ensure children of all abilities and cultural and linguistic backgrounds have high-quality and developmentally appropriate experiences in their early years.

**61%** of child care centers surveyed **do not** have a working security system.<sup>12</sup>

**48%** of licensed child care in Kansas is provided in child care home settings.<sup>13</sup>



**ONLY 8%** of child care facilities offer nontraditional hours (evenings, weekends, overnight)<sup>14</sup>



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

Collaboration efforts exist across services, communities, and at the state level. Yet funding, awareness, and staffing limitations often hinder many efforts from taking a comprehensive approach. This can stifle good intentions and meaningful progress towards streamlining efforts and resources that support children and families.

**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 all.**<sup>15</sup>

**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 families.**<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kansas Early Childhood Systems Building Environmental Needs Survey, 2019

<sup>13</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment Licensing

<sup>14</sup> Child Care Aware of Kansas and Kansas Department for Children & Families, Child Care Supply Demand Report, 2018

<sup>15</sup> Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2020, January), Needs Assessment

<sup>16</sup> Kansas Early Childhood Systems Building Environmental Needs Survey, 2019



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

The current system remains siloed, fragmented, and difficult to navigate, without a model that defines the structures, partners, and best practices for early childhood care and education for all children. Regulations often have unintended consequences that affect accessibility and availability of services. Utilizing multiple funding streams is necessary to sustain services, yet there are often conflicting policy regulations, expectations, or requirements. Primary areas for future systems alignment include regulation and policy, data sharing, funding and resources, and shared governance/ system integration.

### **Kansas lacks the capacity**

to determine an accurate **unduplicated count of children** being served in early childhood care and education programs.



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

Bright spots exist in all regions. Kansas is full of resilient families and communities that are striving to create the best possible circumstances for young children to thrive. Kansas has strong communities with passion, genuine care, and determination for improving the systems for children and families.

**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 Needs Assessment efforts uncovered a reality for many Kansas families that does not match our collective vision for our state, communities, and citizens. Through this process, we now have extensive data that documents the struggles families face, the challenges for our workforce, and the gaps in our systems at both a state and community level. We also have stories of resilience and commitment; bright spots we can build on and opportunities for change to realize our vision.

**Read the full Needs Assessment at**  
**[kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment](https://kschildrenscabinet.org/needs-assessment)**