

Child Care Demonstration Project

Proposal

Seeking support from the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund (Children's Cabinet) for a child care demonstration project (SENT Prep Academy) in the Topeka Hi-Crest neighborhood to:

- purchase a recently-closed child care facility in Topeka and implement multiple solutions for strengthening this community's early childhood system;
- put our commitment to equity into action;
- increase availability and affordability of quality child care during traditional hours and on a drop-in basis in this high-need neighborhood;
- support access to reliable care in a child care desert, enabling parents to work and/or pursue educational opportunities;
- develop and strengthen the local child care workforce through apprenticeships, wage supplements, and partnerships with higher education; and
- establish the new child care center as family engagement hub.

This proposal aligns with *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan (Attachment A) and responds to pervasive community needs exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

A one-time investment of \$250,000 from the Kansas Children's Cabinet would allow SENT (Strengthening and Equipping Neighborhoods Together, a local 501c3) to purchase a child care facility that closed in March due to COVID-19, now up for sale by the owners. The facility closure left the Topeka Hi-Crest neighborhood in desperate need of child care. The neighborhood suffers from high unemployment rates, a large population of low-income households, and a lack of reliable transportation (Attachment B).

The Property

Formerly the Kennedy Academy
206 SE Lakewood Court
Topeka, KS 66609

Asking price: \$300,000

Projected licensed capacity: 86 (previously licensed for 94 without infant and toddler care)

The Partners

This demonstration project brings together a local nonprofit and a regional resource and referral agency. The proposal seeks the support of the Children's Cabinet to achieve project goals.

Community-based non-profit partners:

- **SENT** is an established 501c3 in the neighborhood. Cradle-to-career education is a key part of SENT's approach to neighborhood revitalization. SENT provides the human capital needed for startup through a strong group of committed volunteers. They commit to providing the financial resources and labor needed for renovations, including cleaning, painting, and reconfiguring the space for infants and toddlers per licensing requirements. SENT will shoulder the responsibility for operating costs associated with this property.
- The **Topeka Community Foundation Board of Directors** stands ready to provide financial support to SENT through a combined grant and loan package subject to the Kansas Children's Cabinet approval of the seed money. According to Foundation President Marsh Pope, "As an organization, we are committed to our social determinants of health work and this project addresses so many of those issues in an area of our community that has the highest need. Partnering with you on this project is another exciting part of the big picture for us."
- **Capital Area Successful Start**, an Early Childhood Block Grant funded program, will add SENT Prep Academy to their collaborative to ensure administration and classroom teachers are well supported.

Regional resource and referral agency partner:

- **Child Care Aware of Northeast Kansas (CCA-NEKS)** is a well-established resource agency for child care providers. Although they cannot contribute cash, they are already contributing in-kind support by helping leadership create a business plan, budget, and marketing strategy. They will help with staff recruitment, orientation, and training and will provide access to curriculum and classroom resources through their lending library. CCA-NEKS will help SENT connect with other community resources that may be necessary for renovation and start-up, and will continue to provide focused mentoring assistance as SENT works to achieve long-term sustainability.

Private sector partners

- **Barry Downing** has made a \$50,000 grant commitment through his family foundation to help SENT with operating expenses in their first year.
- **An additional donor** has made a commitment to SENT for a \$5,000 donation.
- SENT will continue to engage with the private sector to identify gift and grant opportunities.

Addressing Local Needs Through Innovative Approaches

Increase availability and affordability of quality child care.

This project will provide a safe, nurturing environment for child care (B-5) giving working parents access to affordable, quality care that is available during traditional hours and on a drop-in basis to meet changes in work schedules. Space will be modified to add an appropriate licensed setting for infant-toddler care and play spaces that promote physical development and extend the safe spaces during the pandemic. The space would also include materials and books that are diverse and culturally relevant.

Develop the workforce.

Child care is a vital strategy for economic development. Child care providers need to be able to afford to be in the profession and not be expected to absorb the actual costs of care through low wages. As our 2019 Needs Assessment documented, the statewide average wage (\$9.25) needs to increase to reflect costs of living and disparities of the workforce. On average, women of color make 84% of their white counterparts (\$7.77). SENT Prep Academy is committed to above average salaries, with entry level wages set budgeted at \$12 per hour. Ongoing professional development will be provided. The project will also explore partnerships with higher education institutions to provide pathways to earn Child Development Associates degree or an Early Childhood Education degree, including student-teaching placements. Additional professional development opportunities are currently being explored.

Generate multiple and diverse funding sources to establish child care as a public good and replicate the model at a local level.

Current budget models for child care are inadequate because the average cost of care exceeds 30% of a families' household income; child care provider wages are low and nationally, child care workers' families are twice as likely to live in poverty as other workers' families; and the child care deserts in the state challenge young parents to find quality care. Relying primarily on family reimbursement and limited federal child care subsidies to families in need has negative implications for families, child care professionals, and business. This demonstration project explores the distribution of actual costs (training, wages, space, operations, etc.) across multiple federal funding sources, community-based agencies, local governments, USDs, parents, philanthropies, and local businesses. The state-to-local public-private partnership model allows for exploration of the power of leveraging funding streams in innovative ways.

Establish the center as a family engagement hub.

The center will be a place for families to convene, participate in parent education programs, and connect with community resources. The center will also partner with area USDs to implement strategies for smooth transitions to kindergarten.

Evaluation, Sustainability, and Scaling

We propose that the Children's Cabinet support this demonstration project with a one-time investment toward facility costs. The project will participate in the same evaluation requirements as other Children's Cabinet programs to support sustainability and scaling. This will include:

- working with the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research and Wichita State University's Community Engagement Institute to participate the Accountability Process,
- participation in the Common Measure Initiative via the DAISEY system,
- submitting quarterly performance reports,
- participating in the Kansas Children's Cabinet information management system,
- updating 1-800-CHILDREN annually or as changes occur,
- providing services addressing the components of the Blueprint for Early Childhood, and
- encouraging partners and families to participate in the *Our Tomorrows StoryBank* project via SenseMaker.

Signed assurances will be provided for the above and to ensure the project is in compliance with safety and accessibility standards.

Background

This fall, we received an inquiry about the use of CARES Act Funding through the Remote Learning Grant program to provide the capital needed to acquire the Hi-Crest property. We explored all options within the CRF funding programs. It was the determination of the Executive Committee overseeing the CRF funds that capital investments are not allowed under the federal CARES Act guidelines. We also consulted with our partner state agencies to explore other federal and grant-funded sources, and that led to consultation with John Yearly, Chief Counsel with the Kansas Department of Administration. Mr. Yearly explored the statutes governing Children's Cabinet investments and other state requirements. Although technically a non-competitive grant, the unique aspects of the project and opportunity to create a demonstration model for public-private partnerships in the early childhood sector, coupled with the discretionary power the Children's Cabinet governing board has to direct investments, our process of holding a public meeting to consider the grant and a vote of the Children's Cabinet constitute an allowable use of funds. Additionally, we provided the background to Governor Kelly and received her support for bringing this opportunity to the Children's Cabinet for consideration as a grant request from the Early Childhood Block Grant to a qualified 501c3 to support site acquisition and leverage other sources of funding in a community-led public-private partnership.

Timeline of proposed next steps and activities

Target Date	Description of Activity	Notes
1/15/2021	Finalize purchase of property	Real estate purchase finalized; all paperwork with state of Kansas complete.
2/15/2021	Building renovations complete	Includes installation of handwashing sink in infant room, partial wall for sleep area in infant room, and toilet in toddler room. Painting and clean up as needed.
2/15/2021	Center director begins full time; advertising for staff, staff recruitment begins	
2/28/2021	Child care license obtained	
3/15/2021	Teaching staff begin work; 3 weeks for staff development and classroom organization	This is the ideal but may be too costly. We may need to get this down to two weeks?
3/27 or 3/28, 2021	Facility ribbon cutting and open house	
4/5/2021	Center opens to public	Estimate opening at 50% enrollment capacity; grow capacity by 5% each month

ATTACHMENT A

The All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan for Early Childhood outlines goals for increasing access to high quality child care, addressing shortages of infant and toddler care, improving community partnerships and parent engagement, focusing on equity and diversity, and supporting the early childhood workforce. (<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/>)

Related strategies and tactics

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

<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/goal-2-community-level-collaboration/strategy-2-2/>

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.

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

<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/goal-5-capacity-and-access/strategy-5-3/>

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 needs.

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.

<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/goal-5-capacity-and-access/strategy-5-4/>

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.

6.2 Implement a high-quality, competency-based professional development system.

<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/goal-6-workforce/strategy-6-2/>

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

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.

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

<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/goal-6-workforce/strategy-6-3/>

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.

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

<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/strategic-plan/goal-7-quality-and-environments/strategy-7-1/>

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.

ATTACHMENT B

Need

Forty-four percent of Kansans live in a child care desert (CCA-KS, DCF, 2018). The Hi-Crest neighborhood is one such desert. This area is severely lacking in child care options and many residents lack transportation—getting to child care facilities outside of the immediate area presents a significant challenge. Other challenges the community face include higher levels of poverty than the rest of Shawnee County and the state. Based on census tract data for the community, **nearly a third (29%) of the population is at or below the poverty level and 65% of children under 5 are living below the poverty level.** Community residents also have lower levels of median income and education, making it even more difficult to afford child care when it is available.

The average annual cost of full-time care in a child care center in Kansas ranges from \$9,430 for preschool-aged children to \$10,955 for infants. For full-time care in family/home setting, the average range is \$6,235 to \$6,749. This means the average annual cost of full-time care for an infant in a family child care home represents 13% of the state median household income. The annual cost of full-time care in a child care center represents 20% of the state median household income (CCA-KS, 2018; CCA-KS, DCF, 2018). **Less than half of all providers accept subsidy:** 37% of family child care homes and 46% of child care centers are Department for Children and Families child care subsidy providers (CCA-KS, 2018). For single parents of infants and toddlers the situation is even worse: **child care costs 48.7% of income** (Child Trends, Zero to Three, 2019).

In addition to a lack of child care options and the proportionally high cost of child care for struggling families, **the Hi-Crest community also represents traditionally underserved populations.** Census tract data shows that only 39.5% of individuals identify as white alone (not Hispanic or Latino) whereas Shawnee County has 73.4% white alone residents, and the state has 75.4%. The community also has a higher percentage of Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino residents than both the county and the state. The table below details these comparisons and other relevant demographic data.

This project offers an opportunity for the Children’s Cabinet and other project partners to demonstrate their commitment to equity by increasing the availability of child care in a community with great need and populated by residents who are traditionally underserved and underrepresented.

Hi-Crest, Shawnee Co, and State of Kansas Demographic Comparison

		Hi-Crest	Shawnee Co.	State of Kansas
Race	White	54.2%	80.9%	83.60%
	White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	39.5%	73.4%	75.40%
	Black or African American	26.2%	8.5%	5.70%
	American Indian and Alaska Native	0.8%	0.8%	0.80%
	Asian	0.2%	1.2%	3.0%
	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	0.1%
	Other	9.70%	4.5%	3.0%
	Two or more races	8.90%	3.3%	3.7%
Ethnicity	Hispanic or Latino	25.9%	12.8%	12.2%
	Not Hispanic or Latino	74.1%	87.2%	87.8%
Sex	Female	54.8%	51.6%	50.4%
	Male	45.2%	48.4%	49.6%
Age	Median age	31.1	40.2	37.2
	Under 5 years of age	8.5%	5.9%	6.3%
Education	Less than high school graduate	14.0%	6.3%	8.2%
	High school diploma or equivalency	53.8%	30.6%	26%
Poverty	Percent below poverty level	27.90%	8.6%	11.4%
	Children under 5 below poverty level	64.60%	13.6%	17.1%
	Households receiving SNAP	23.10%	7%	7.0%
	Median household income	\$36,250	\$59,441	\$62,087
Housing	Owner-occupied units	48.30%	67.0%	66.5%
	Renter-occupied units	51.70%	33.0%	33.5%

Data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018 & 2019