

KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS PANEL

Monthly Meeting Minutes
Friday, December 18, 2020



Visit the [Children's Cabinet website](#) for meeting materials and the [YouTube recording](#).

Members Present

Nichelle Adams, Kansas Department for Children and Families

Jennifer Adhima, Project Eagle, University of Kansas Medical Center

Marites Altuna, Kansas Deaf-Blind Project

Rachel Anno, Kansas Department for Children and Families

Mallory Arellano, Newman University

Emily Barnes, Barnes Child Care

Deanna Berry, Russell Child Development Center

Tanya Bulluck, Child Start

Gail Cozadd, Kansas Children's Service League

Rachele FioRito, United Way of the Plain

Jenny Flinders, University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research

Kelly Frantz-Langford, TARC, Inc.

Amy Gottschamer, Googols of Learning

Kim Hawkins, USD 233 Olathe Public Schools

Eva Horn, University of Kansas Department of Special Education

Peggy Kelly, Kansas Head Start Association

Kim Kennedy, Kansas Department for Children and Families

Emily Killough, Children's Mercy Kansas City

Lorrena (Lori) Kravitz, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

David Lindeman, University of Kansas Life Span Institute at Parsons

Kelli Mark, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Natalie McClane, Kansas State Department of Education

Amy Meek, Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund

Paula Neth, The Family Conservancy

Kristin Pedersen, University of Kansas Speech Language Hearing Clinic

Patti Peschel, Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc.

Amanda Petersen, Kansas State Department of Education

Dee Rankin, Child Start, Inc.

Sarah Rivers, Via Christi Rehabilitation

Angie Saenger, Child Care Aware of Kansas

Jan Scheideman, Riley County Health Department

Chelsea Schulte, Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc.

Cassandra Sines, Sines Virtual Assistant Service

Heather Staab, Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Cornelia Stevens, TOP Early Learning Centers

Amber Tankersley, Pittsburg State University

Reva Wywadis, Child Care Aware of Eastern Kansas

Minutes

Welcome

Amanda Petersen called the meeting to order with a quorum present, described processes for a remote meeting, and directed participants to the [Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund website](#) for meeting materials.

Meeting Agenda

Amy Meek moved to approve the agenda and Eva Horn seconded, with a unanimous vote to approve the agenda as presented.

October 16, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Dave Lindeman moved to approve the November minutes and Natalie McClane seconded, with a unanimous vote to approve the November minutes as presented.

Kansans' Open Forum - Written and Verbal Comments:

Mitch Rucker, Kansas Action for Children Early Learning Policy Advisor, encouraged the Panel to recommend the Children's Cabinet support three specific items:

- First, Kansas Action for Children encourages the state to expand the existing employer tax credit for child care.
- Second, the Legislature should designate the full amount of required state matching funds to draw down all available federal dollars through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, a pool of discretionary dollars Congress sends to states to strengthen the child care field.
- Finally, Kansas Action for Children encourages officials to implement and fund programs that support child care provider retention and workforce development, and incentivize high-quality care in the child care field.
- "I hope that this panel will recommend to the Children's Cabinet that they support these positions as we move into the legislative session, and beyond. The first two items, the tax credit and the Child Care Development Block Grant funding, will require legislative approval, so we would appreciate the support of this group of early childhood stakeholders as we move in and support these programs legislatively."

Panel members shared appreciation for this work, and asked what entities other than C-corporations would be entitled to use the employer tax credit for child care? Rucker said the idea is that smaller businesses would be able to take advantage of this, and that Kansas Action for Children would also like to target this proposal to encourage employers to support employees of all income levels, not just high-income employees.

Amanda Petersen inquired about the timeline of when the Kansas Legislature might make these decisions. Rucker said in a typical year the Legislature convenes on the second Monday in January, and will start working through the legislative process in January and February. Hopefully the Child Care Development Block Grant will be worked in early, but could wait until May when a final budget is finalized. Decisions regarding the tax credit will probably be between January and March.

Written comment was received from Connie Larcom, an early childhood educator and provider in Anthony, Kansas who shared concerns for the early childhood system during the pandemic.

- “I am worried that with our 5 and under children they are missing the important mouth movement for prespeech and reading. Without visible PPE for all providers our youngest early learners are missing some very important beginning speech movements.
- “Also mental health for providers. During the last 90 days the incredible strain in grant writing, paperwork, increase in COVID cases, low numbers in homes. Well honestly, it’s taking its toll on our providers. We need more help out there for these to essential workers.”

Follow-up from last meeting - Debbie Deere

- Resource Directory of Councils, Committees, and Workgroup has been developed and is now available to stakeholders on the Children’s Cabinet website ([link to Stakeholder Directory](#)). There is an overview of each group to better understand their work. This is a very fluid document. Keep contacting Debbie (ddeere@ksde.org) if you have additional groups/information to add to the Directory.
- The panel member bios and pictures are now live on the website as well ([link to Panel Members](#)).
- Kindergarten Transitions Recommendation and Memorandum of Understanding Toolkit – November 10, the Panel finalized and made recommendation. It was accepted by the Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund on December 4. The Early Childhood Stakeholders’ Group shared feedback on dissemination plan on December 4. On January 6, the Kindergarten Transitions Workgroup will meet to finalize a dissemination plan. The toolkit and other resources are posted on the [Kindergarten Readiness Summit webpage](#) on the Children’s Cabinet website.
- COVID-19 Response discussion – At the September meeting, an important piece that came from that, was that child care providers need support in

empowering themselves to take sick days to care for their health. Research was done on policy options in the area. These resources were used:

- [Home-Based Child Care Emergency Fund: Sustaining our nation's diverse home-based child care community](#), Home Grown and Reinvestment Fund, March 2020
- [COVID-19 Resources & Policy Considerations](#), The Hunt Institute, 2020
- [COVID-19 Resources for Policymakers](#), Child Care Aware of America, 2020
- [Paid Sick Leave](#), National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020
- [Picking Up the Pieces: Building a Better Child Care System Post COVID-19](#), Child Care Aware of America, Fall 2020

Amanda Petersen opened the floor for questions, and reminded the panel that if members are aware of ideas and policy proposals from other states, that these can be shared with Debbie.

[Kansas' Child Care Development Fund State Plan](#)

Nichelle Adams, Early Education and Child Care Services Manager from the Kansas Department for Children and Families presented on the process to develop the Child Care Development Fund State Plan for Kansas for 2022-2024.

- The Kansas Department for Children and Families receives federal funds from the Office of Child Care through the Child Care Development Fund. The majority of funds have to be spent on direct services, like the Child Care Subsidy Program. A portion can be used to improve the quality of child care, and other additional services to parents.
- Primary goal of funds is to help low-income working families, to increase their access to affordable, high quality child care.
- Every three years the agency submits a State Plan for how they will use those funds, but the State Plan also helps to plan for the future. The agency is starting the work for 2022-2024, and will be planning meetings with agencies and early childhood partners throughout the state.
- Want to have these meetings in January. Asking that different people be invited depending on each topic. Plan to invite members of the panel to these meetings.
- Topics of meetings:
 - Section 1 - Disaster Response Coordination
 - Section 2 - Outreach and Consumer Education

- Section 3 and 4 – Increasing Access to Quality Child Care
- Section 5 – Monitoring Process
- Section 6 – Recruitment and Retention of Workforce
- Section 7 – Supporting Continuous Quality Improvement
- Many areas of alignment between the different components of the Child Care Development Fund State Plan and the *All in for Kansas Kids* needs assessment and strategic plan.
- During the meetings, want to talk about how to best gather future input on topic ideas. Planning meetings do not take place of public meetings to gather public comment on the draft plan.
- Agency would like to have a final draft of this plan before April.

Amanda Petersen noted that in November the Panel discussed the need for a statewide comprehensive coordinated plan around supporting child care, and that this Kansas Child Care Development Fund State Plan is a major component of using significant federal funding to do that, along with the *All in for Kansas Kids* strategic plan.

Panel members asked clarifying questions and provided feedback regarding these meetings. These included:

- How are we going to make sure to engage interaction with child care providers, both directors and family child care providers who work during the day? Will we make sure there is active engagement, so that important ones that directly affect providers' businesses, are held during times providers can attend? It is important to engage, not just inform. *Noted that part of the discussions in January will be how to best gather input to inform the Child Care Development Fund State Plan on an ongoing basis, and that there may be opportunities to combine with the All in for Kansas Kids work since there is close alignment. Also noted that the State Plan is fluid and can be amended.*
- Discussion regarding high commitment of child care providers in the field, particularly during the last several months.
- Regarding the Kansas Child Care Subsidy Program, is there any flexibility to provide the subsidy of parents who are advancing their skills and education to support their families? *Noted that at this time, those eligibility requirements are in Kansas statute, so changing this would require statutory change.*
- Gathering providers' perspective on the front end to allow for fewer changes later on. Getting input that is beneficial to them if included in the

beginning. If you have their buy-in from the beginning, and you're working together to make systemic change, then they will be more apt to work together.

- Discussion around process to develop the 2019 Needs Assessment, and that there is still work to be done to inform child care providers about what that work was, engage and create buy-in and understanding.
- Have there been engagement opportunities or state initiatives with successful strategies that we might consider moving forward when doing this kind of planning? Everything during COVID. Before COVID, providers may or may not catch which emails are important, or understand what the purpose was. Child care providers have personal connections with county licensing surveyors, child care resource and referral agencies, grant opportunities, who can make sure important information is shared and understood.

Melissa Rooker requested that the Panel recommend strategies to better engage child care providers and families, and for state agencies to better communicate and gather feedback. Shared appreciation to the Kansas Department for Children and Families for increased efforts to engage with stakeholders to develop the next phase of the Child Care Development Fund State Plan.

Several Panel members agreed to help with this request. Discussion that most effective communication may be face-to-face conversations, and empowering stakeholders to share information via word of mouth.

[Kansas Beats the Virus Initiative](#)

Debbie Deere noted that the Kansas Leadership Center launched "[Kansas Beats the Virus](#)," a bi-partisan public health partnership with the State of Kansas. The Kansas Leadership Center is calling on its partners and alumni to hold 1,000 community meetings across the state by December 31, with a goal to inspire local solutions that keep Kansans healthy, schools and businesses open, and our economy strong amidst the pandemic.

Melissa Rooker volunteered to coordinate a meeting with 10 Recommendation Panel Kansas Leadership Center alumni members on December 14. The goal of the group was to form an action plan to combat the pandemic. The group chose to discuss creating a social media campaign throughout the early childhood network, and utilize Twitter, the Children's Cabinet website, and panel member agency/organization websites. They will take this project and identify specific talking points for practicing continued safety measures with a commitment to help create positive messages about mask-wearing, social distancing, and avoiding large gatherings.

Melissa asked the Panel to workshop and create messaging among their organizations and spheres of influences. The action plan will be implemented in January. Panel members noted that there may be good messages already developed by local emergency management and other trusted sources that could be adjusted and shared with an early childhood focus.

Overview of Kansas' COVID-19 Vaccine Plan

Amanda Petersen shared [the COVID-19 Vaccine webpage on the Kansas Department of Health and Environment site](#), which includes the Kansas COVID-19 Vaccine Plan and weekly updates.

- The initial vaccine distribution in Kansas will be geared towards health care associated workers and long-term care residents and staff, in line with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommendations.
- As vaccine supplies increase, additional populations will be targeted, with the general population expected by late spring/early summer.

Melissa Rooker serves on the COVID-19 Vaccination Program Implementation Committee. Committee members are currently responding to a questionnaire that the Kansas Department of Health and Environment developed.

The conversation was open to questions and comments from panel members. These included:

- Will the Kansas Department of Health and Environment be issuing guidance around whether individuals who have received the vaccine should continue wearing masks and social distancing?
 - Several Panel members noted that health care providers, including Children's Mercy Hospital, are communicating that individuals should continue wearing masks and social distancing after they have been vaccinated.
- Heartspring provides residential and day school services to children ages five through 21 impacted by developmental disabilities. Is it considered a long-term care facility or a school?
- Will home visitors be required to take the vaccine?
- Where do Infant-Toddler Part C early intervention service (tiny-k) staff fall? Education? Noted that there are particular considerations for this group: provide services that are legally required, serving a medically fragile population, includes a range of staff (teachers, therapists, nurses providing care as part of the Technology Assisted (TA) waiver).

- Will the Kansas Department of Health and Environment be updating the state guidance for licensed child care for things like quarantine period? Noted that specific state guidance helps child care providers as they are developing policies for their locations.
 - Panel members discussed that strong state guidance helps support early childhood care and education providers in their decision making. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment is continuing to make updates to guidance, but won't be more specific about quarantine due to local partners' authority. Lori Kravitz invited Panel members to contact her directly if they would like to further discuss Kansas Department of Health and Environment guidance for child care providers.

Kansas COVID-19 Response

Panel members were asked the following questions, and provided feedback relating to Kansas' response to COVID-19:

- What were the gaps between community needs and state programs to address the pandemic in 2020?
 - It was challenging that each county had a different approach for issues like quarantine requirements. Early childhood care and education programs often serve multiple communities and counties.
 - Kansas law currently gives authority for most decision-making to local county health departments on issues like quarantines. The Kansas Legislature will consider this issue when they reconvene in January.
 - Kansas adjusted the Health Fund portion of the Hero Relief Program to provide support for lost wages for essential workers (including education staff and child care providers) if they tested positive due to COVID-19. This was a positive change. However, it could not provide support for lost wages for workers who had to quarantine despite not testing positive. More staff were out due to quarantine than due to testing positive, and this gap meant that employers either had to find alternatives to pay them or require them to take leave without pay. Should future funding be available, it would be helpful to make support available for workers losing wages due to quarantine.
 - Different counties took different approaches to distributing the Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansans (SPARK) federal relief funding. The application and decision-making process was extremely different depending on county.

- How Kansans experience the pandemic varies greatly depending on location. The Panel is one place where we can come together to share with our peers what the situation looks like for us, in our home communities.
- What is needed moving forward?
 - The federal Family First Coronavirus Relief Act provided additional paid leave for some employees, but is scheduled to expire (as of Dec. 18).
 - Continued support of remote learning for families, with funding available to support devices and connectivity for families participating in early childhood services typically based in classroom – expanding the Technology for Families program beyond home visiting services. Many classrooms are shifting to remote learning because there are not enough staff available due to quarantining.
 - If the CARES Act is renewed, continuation of the Remote Learning Grants.
 - Child care providers are seeing additional costs regarding personal protection equipment and other basic supplies like groceries. If they do not have funding to cover those costs, concern providers will not be able to operate while following increased health and safety practices.
- What additional lessons can we learn from our experience this fall, or what lessons learned should we underscore from our conversation in September?
 - We are all more resilient and more able to work quickly than we ever knew.
 - Child care is an essential part of making our state workforce work, has been elevated. As we move forward in advocacy and messaging, people are understanding and hearing in a whole new way.
 - As a provider, I have felt very supported by Child Care Aware of Kansas through this process, doing things like checking in to see what I need. If in 3 years I'm able to look back and say we were able to have committed providers who were supported and able to engage in conversation on these are the things I needed, and we listened. We do have the ability to sit down, discuss what situations didn't work and what was tweaked, and it makes me really excited – we can make engaging with the child care providers, whether it's center-based directors or family child care working in their homes, let's make sure we are engaging and working together.

- Amazed by creativity and resilience of early childhood care and education providers with the use of technology. Staff have been forced to learn and have done really well with it. In Southwest Kansas, some Learn and Play facilitators have reported they have higher attendance this way than before when groups met in-person, even though we wish groups could be in-person, we're able to do things like porch drop-offs of materials as new ways to engage with families.
- Elevate the importance of parent choice and voice. Letting parents decide what they are comfortable with in terms of what type of services they want to receive, and then adapting to honor that.
- The importance of attending to the mental health of our staff, parents, and children, and documenting the service gaps of what is currently available in our state in this area.
- Considering remote services for early intervention and preschool: How quickly early intervention providers adapted to virtual visits. This has increased parent engagement for some because parents must be more involved in the visit, but there are also families that this service model does not meet their needs who are now turning to outpatient services to get additional support. On the schooling side, teachers have been very inventive during this time and have stepped up, even when challenging.

Discussion of Next Steps

Panel members discussed what steps they would like to take moving forward in 2021:

- In January, the Panel will revisit the Role, Norms, and Procedures of the Panel document to consider how we can do our work most effectively, and how we can make that document more affordable.

The Panel discussed next steps on the state employer tax credit for child care, workforce supports, and drawing down all Child Care Development Block Grant funds.

- Can place policy items on the agenda and share that draft agenda, so that stakeholders can share feedback during the Kansans' Open Forum portion of the January meeting.
- Panel members indicated that it would be helpful for Kansas Action for Children to share additional information regarding the proposal to adjust the Kansas child care tax credit for businesses to encourage more people to utilize it.

- Discussed the role of the Panel: to serve as an advisory group to the Children’s Cabinet, able to dig into technical details of policy proposals. The Panel would seek Cabinet acceptance of new materials created prior to sharing with the general public.
 - The Panel can work to create a shared understanding of what a policy ask is and common understanding of the reasoning to support it, and then bring that forward as a valuable legislative priority to support.
 - Many Panel members have the ability to independently advocate and offer testimony from their own organizations and points of view.
 - The Panel has the ability to work through a process to make formal recommendations to the Children’s Cabinet while influencing the Kansas early childhood system, both now and in the future.
 - We do not anticipate that Panel staff will be making recommendations, presenting testimony, etc. to the Legislature.
 - The Panel can create toolkits, messages, etc. to create shared understanding of the value of policy proposals. This is also a great group to workshop and brainstorm regarding the details of specific policy proposals.
- Determined that the next best step is to have further conversation in January regarding current policy in Kansas and what changes might be, and capture that in our meeting minutes.

Have identified at least two areas to form workgroups and do additional work. Panel members can contact Debbie Deere to share interest in serving on one or both workgroups, and Debbie will then coordinate the groups:

- **Develop messaging strategies to share #KSBeatsTheVirus messages with the general public from an early childhood perspective.**
 - Timeframe: work underway in January
- **Develop recommendations for how state agencies can better engage providers while developing policies or seeking feedback.**
 - Discussed timeframe: the best things happen when they’re not rushed. The development of the Child Care Development Fund State Plan creates a natural opportunity for conversation on this topic, and many Panel members will be engaged in that work in January.

- Will gather interest from Panel members who may be interested in helping to create a recommendation at some point, and that group can consider next steps and a timeline.
- How to engage child care providers in ways they're able to participate is so important, and many dynamics apply to family members as well: they may have other commitments during the day, etc. Would it be possible for that group to take the perspective of, what's good for providers is good for parents and let's build an inclusive process? Noted that the December 16 *All in for Kansas Kids* webinar focused on Family and Consumer Partnership strategies with good information as well. ([Webinar archives are linked here.](#))

Upcoming Meetings (all via Zoom)

- Kindergarten Transitions Workgroup: January 6, 11:00 a.m.
- Early Childhood Recommendations Panel meeting - Friday, January 15, 9:00-11:30 a.m.
 - Third Fridays of the month, beginning at 9:00 a.m.
- Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund meeting - Friday, February 5, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- Kansas Early Childhood Stakeholders Group Meeting - Friday, February 5, 1:30 - 3:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.