

All In For Kansas Kids

Strategic Plan for Early Childhood, 2024

Pillar 1: Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem

Goal 1.

Strengthen the continuum of early childhood services through widespread collaboration across state and local partners.

Goal 1 Actions:

- 1.1. Formalize decision-making authority for the continuum of early childhood services to support accountability, transparency, and data-informed initiatives for children, families, and the workforce.
- 1.2. Improve consistency of expectations related to early childhood services contracted by and funded through state agencies to reduce administrative inefficiencies and align data collection efforts.
- 1.3. Ensure all early childhood funding decisions made by state agencies are mapped to strategic plan goals or actions.
- 1.4. Identify Strategic Plan Action Leads and develop a transparent, adaptive, and inclusive process for enacting and monitoring progress toward goals.
- 1.5. Ensure early childhood providers and families are included in all local or state emergency response planning efforts to help young children and families navigate and recover from disruptions (e.g. natural disasters, pandemics, cyber-attacks).
- 1.6. Enhance coordination across home visiting service models.
- 1.7. Ensure all state agencies and departments understand their impact and connection to the early childhood ecosystem.

Goal 2.

Connect families to the right service at the right time through comprehensive networks of resources and services.

Goal 2 Actions:

- 2.1. Inventory existing local networks that help families connect to services. Promote successful models and encourage community adoption/implementation of 'no wrong door' approaches for families.
- 2.2. Capture and communicate about bright spots and lessons learned around resource and referral networks in local communities. Use the *All In For Kansas Kids* website, governance group communication channels, and community coalition meetings to promote widespread adoption of proven practices.
- 2.3. Increase uptake of 1-800-CHILDREN as a trusted referral source used by both families and providers.

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- 2.4. Develop community- and family-informed benchmarks for seamless navigation of the early childhood ecosystem. Invest in resources that help communities ensure their local continuum of services meets these benchmarks.
- 2.5. Increase the number of community-based referral networks that include both early childhood and public/private health care providers to support stronger cross-sector relationships.

Goal 3.

Measure impact across the continuum of early childhood services over time and use the data to make changes that reduce disparities and improve outcomes for children.

Goal 3 Actions:

- 3.1. Identify and adopt quality indicators and targets for the continuum of early childhood services in key outcome areas. Include, among others:
 - Family engagement metrics
 - Healthy development metrics
 - Child care licensing metrics
 - Workforce development metrics
 - Maternal/child health metrics
 - Child care quality metrics
 - Home visiting metrics
 - Family well-being metrics
- 3.2. Integrate cross-sector data using the Kansas Data Trust Authorized Project process to measure progress toward targets.
- 3.3. Optimize existing data dashboards to reflect adopted quality indicators and targets. Support program leaders with progress monitoring to identify disparities and areas needing improvement.
- 3.4. Establish and implement a statewide quality indicators communication plan that increases transparency, generates more robust data, and supports greater understanding of priorities, targets, and impact. Target communications by audience: families, providers, state leaders, and community decision-makers.
- 3.5. Establish a statewide bi-annual data-collection cycle for gathering family experiences across the continuum of early childhood services to analyze quality and effectiveness, and to reduce family navigation burdens.

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- 3.6. Establish a data collection cycle for assessing progress on ecosystem unification guided by the Early Childhood Transition Task Force recommendations.
- 3.7. Identify tools and resources for measuring the impact of natural disasters and environmental disruptions on children and families; use the data to make changes that mitigate risk and reduce vulnerability.
- 3.8. Grow participation in the P20W state longitudinal data system by aligning data collections, integrating with the existing Kansas Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), and promoting the system as a rich source of information on the long-term impact of early childhood investments.

Goal 4.

Promote agreements between public and private sectors to expand early childhood supports.

Goal 4 Actions:

- 4.1. Develop a resource hub—using *All In For Kansas Kids* communication channels—of strategies and successful approaches to public-private partnerships in Kansas communities.
- 4.2. Identify readiness factors and document both resources and policy improvements necessary to scale successful community public-private partnership models expanding family access to child care.
- 4.3. Develop and publicize different fiscal approaches to supporting child care for a private sector audience that increase understanding of diverse regional needs and investment opportunities.
- 4.4. Establish local and/or regional Go Teams as an extension of the state-level Go Team to support communities with identifying solutions to child care challenges.
- 4.5. Establish a network of standing early childhood coalitions across Kansas by continuing to invest in the Communities-in-Action model and similar coalition-building supports for child care.
- 4.6. Publicize family-friendly workplace resources through the *All In For Kansas Kids* website, governance group communication channels, and existing working groups that promote employer-driven support for families.
- 4.7. Work with the Kansas Department of Commerce to develop language that encourages businesses who receive economic incentives to include plans for addressing the child care needs of their workforce.

Goal 5.

Support policies and/or efforts that increase capacity, enhance quality, improve access to services, and contribute to economic security for families.

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Goal 5 Actions:

- 5.1. Make it easier for families to access federal and state resources that address basic needs.
- 5.2. Identify possible administrative flexibilities within federal funding guidelines for early childhood programs (e.g. MIECHV, CCDF) to increase capacity and improve family access to services.
- 5.3. Maximize use of Medicaid to serve children ages birth to 5 and their families by:
 - Identifying covered services that aren't currently being billed to the extent possible,
 - Exploring data sharing possibilities to improve outcomes and cost savings,
 - Increasing outreach to local providers to improve understanding of Medicaid-eligible services and reimbursement procedures, and
 - Approving more two-generational behavioral health approaches.
- 5.4. Leverage state matching funds to ensure maximum draw down of federal resources for the continuum of early childhood services.
- 5.5. Analyze administrative policies and contracts governing state-to-local funding to identify barriers that may limit the flexibility of communities to redistribute resources in response to their unique local needs.
- 5.6. Explore the potential impact on children and families of administrative and policy changes through scenario planning, cost modeling, and calculator tools.
- 5.7. Establish a routine quality improvement cycle for child care licensing regulations.
- 5.8. Develop an emergency response plan that prioritizes financial resources for families with children ages birth to 5 during periods of natural disasters or environmental disruptions.

Goal 6.

Strengthen existing tools and create new resources that help families make informed decisions and experience seamless transitions in support of their child's interests, healthy social-emotional development, and academic potential.

Goal 6 Actions:

- 6.1. Support seamless transitions for families by strengthening partnerships between elementary schools and early childhood providers.

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- 6.2. Promote inclusive practices and provide accompanying supports so that children with, or at risk of, developmental delays and children with special health care needs from ages birth to 5 can participate in regular early childhood programs together with typically developing peers.
- 6.3. Support data collection and monitoring efforts to identify and address disparities.
- 6.4. Promote use of the ASQ Statewide Online system among service providers who directly support families with children ages birth to 5.
- 6.5. Embed routine screening, referral practices, and reimbursements—where appropriate—into programs that directly support young children birth to 5.
- 6.6. Recognize the prenatal period as a significant transition and an opportunity to introduce families to services in the continuum of early childhood programs (e.g. WIC, Medicaid services, home visiting, Dolly Parton Imagination Library).

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Pillar 2: Early Childhood Workforce and Environments

Goal 1.

Support strategies to increase the overall compensation of early childhood professionals and improve the financial sustainability of programs.

Goal 1 Actions:

- 1.1. Produce a comprehensive study of exemplary wage and compensation strategies from Kansas communities and other states to inform potential local and state investments.
- 1.2. Establish a compensation ladder with a competitive wage floor and financial incentives to recruit, retain, and support advancement of a diverse workforce.
- 1.3. Scale promising differential pay programs that aim to increase infant/toddler child care slots.
- 1.4. Expand differential pay strategies to increase the number of professionals providing child care services for children with disabilities, developmental delays, or special health care needs and those needing care during non-traditional hours.
- 1.5. Support policies that increase availability of benefit packages (e.g. paid leave, health insurance) for early childhood professionals.
- 1.6. Create a continuum of expectations and resources that support child care owners with business operations, such as budgeting, succession planning, and enrollment management.
- 1.7. Expand utilization of Shared Service networks and especially targeting promotion of these network services toward family child care facilities.

Goal 2.

Build workforce capacity to provide high-quality early childhood services.

Goal 2 Actions:

- 2.1. Document and distribute detailed information on effective models for recruiting new professionals into programs across the continuum of services for early childhood (e.g. high school career exploration courses, apprenticeship programs, returnships).
- 2.2. Partner with higher education leaders, including the Kansas Board of Regents, to create additional degree advancement opportunities for the workforce that align with the Kansas Early Childhood Career Pathway.

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- 2.3. Launch a comprehensive early childhood apprenticeship program that includes opportunities for both directors/owners and educators.
- 2.4. Coordinate with the Kansas Department of Commerce to ensure economic development projects are effectively supported in planning for child care needs.
- 2.5. Ensure all state-funded professional recruitment and retention materials are available in languages other than English to support an increase in the number of professionals representing diverse communities.
- 2.6. Expand innovative and effective child care initiatives, like the Small Center Pilot, to provide more flexible work environments for child care professionals.
- 2.7. Develop resources for state agencies, partners, and early childhood programs to support contingency plans for operating during or after major disruptions.
- 2.8. Identify common challenges for early childhood professionals to stay in the workforce. Learn from lived experiences (e.g. data from exit interviews of those leaving home visiting, child care, early intervention programs, Head Start, and preschool programs).

Goal 3.

Support early childhood professionals to help them reach their professional development goals.

Goal 3 Actions:

- 3.1. Execute the Kansas Early Childhood Career Pathway implementation plan, ensuring alignment with Core Competencies and higher education.
- 3.2. Convene a working group to explore and recommend integration opportunities between child care and home visiting professional development services.
- 3.3. Stand up the Workforce Registry and develop a plan for ongoing development/quality improvement and implementation statewide. Ensure equitable access and incentivize adoption of the Registry.
- 3.4. Develop plans, through the Workforce Registry Governance Board, for using data from the Registry to better understand and adjust for workforce challenges and preferences.
- 3.5. Create a protocol for new training, mentorship, and coaching programs that aligns with the Kansas Early Childhood Career Pathway and core competencies. Use the protocol to ensure professional development programs are of high quality and meet the diverse needs of professionals.

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- 3.6. Establish a routine quality improvement process for the array of professional development offerings. Include feedback from both professionals and families with young children, and focus on:
 - completeness/accuracy of core competencies,
 - effectiveness of professional development promotional efforts, and
 - adequacy of higher-level offerings for professionals with significant tenure in the field.
- 3.7. Increase the number of professional development opportunities that integrate best and/or evidence-based practices into service delivery. Focus on trauma-informed care, maternal and early childhood mental health, behavioral health, special health care needs, and early literacy.
- 3.8. Address gaps in the offerings of linguistically and diverse-ability appropriate professional development for the early childhood workforce.
- 3.9. Ensure professionals in multiple settings and roles have access to joint professional development activities across settings, including opportunities for both school-based and non-school-based professionals.
- 3.10. Establish mentorship and coaching offerings to integrate best practices into service delivery and support knowledge transfer.

Goal 4.

Support high quality programming and resources for children in all birth to 5 environments so they can reach appropriate developmental goals.

Goal 4 Actions:

- 4.1. Help early childhood programs upgrade facilities, materials, and curriculum to ensure high-quality environments that meet the needs of all young children, particularly those with special health care needs.
- 4.2. Expand training offerings to ensure professionals can build proficiency in the Kansas Early Learning Standards, the Child Care Core Competencies, and the Home Visiting Core Competencies.
- 4.3. Expand Links to Quality statewide to ensure consistent, high quality early childhood environments.
- 4.4. Support local networks, such as Local Interagency Coordinating Councils, that champion and increase family and provider access to the ASQ Enterprise account.
- 4.5. Address gaps in the availability of linguistically- and diverse-ability-appropriate learning materials.

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- 4.6. Promote and support models that enable young children with disabilities, developmental delays, or special health care needs to realize their full potential while fully participating in settings with their typically developing peers.
- 4.7. Create and distribute planning and training resources for early childhood programs to support mitigation, adaption, and resilience efforts for responding to natural disasters and emergencies.

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Pillar 3: Experiences of Children and Families

Goal 1.

Engage families in experiences to both learn and contribute, while creating new opportunities to help shape the early childhood ecosystem.

Goal 1 Actions:

- 1.1. Prepare state agencies, coalitions, and workgroups to incorporate family engagement best practices and equip or train families to meaningfully engage in early childhood initiatives.
- 1.2. Provide connections and resources for family leaders seeking increased advocacy knowledge or leadership training.
- 1.3. Compensate families for participating in learning experiences, collaborations, and leadership activities at the state level.
- 1.4. Pilot targeted strategies for incorporating family voices in early childhood ecosystem decision-making that minimizes burden on families.
- 1.5. Look for and celebrate bright spots in communities around co-creating with families.
- 1.6. Create safe spaces and accessible ways for families to share stories of lived experiences. Routinely invite participation and develop reliable methods to act on insights and barriers.
- 1.7. Turn family input and feedback into action and positive change.

Goal 2.

Build awareness of the services available to help families make informed decisions in support of their child's interests, healthy development, and learning.

Goal 2 Actions:

- 2.1. Distribute information on healthy development and screening across the continuum of services including family resource centers and partners in the broader ecosystem (e.g. public play places, physical health settings, elementary schools).
- 2.2. Equip community-based facilities, including health care facilities and Family Resource Centers, with critical information on the resources available – such as 1800-CHILDREN – to help families understand, navigate, and access needed services.
- 2.3. Ensure early childhood ecosystem websites and online resources prioritize family-friendly language and clear information for families to understand healthy development milestones and screening resources.

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- 2.4. Co-create artifacts that document both families' lived and preferred experiences on navigating the services and programs that support children age B-5 in realizing healthy development goals and academic potential.
- 2.5. Co-create and publicize resources to increase family understanding of healthy development milestones and how to request screening services.

Goal 3.

Improve child well-being by increasing access to the continuum of services that prioritize safe, nurturing parent/caregiver relationships and strong families.

Goal 3 Actions:

- 3.1. Streamline agreements between the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and appropriate entities to support automatic enrollment or referral to eligible services when families sign up for WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). Likewise, support referrals to WIC from other appropriate services.
- 3.2. Study geographic gaps in prevention activities across the continuum of early childhood services, and work to increase well-being supports in rural, high-poverty, and other traditionally underserved areas.
- 3.3. Support models or approaches that prioritize parent-child bonding during situations where parents are receiving substance abuse treatment or involved with the criminal justice system.
- 3.4. Collaborate across community services to develop tiered-response approaches that can help de-escalate an emerging family crisis.
- 3.5. Ensure families in need can access concrete economic supports to meet their basic needs (e.g. food, shelter, broadband supports, and newborn supports).
- 3.6. Identify and leverage resources, programs and policies that bolster efforts to create family friendly workplaces in Kansas
- 3.7. Support the work of the KS Fights Addiction initiative specifically ensuring that the early childhood perspective is incorporated into community solutions and interventions.
- 3.8. Identify and leverage resources, programs and policies that bolster efforts to increase overall family well-being.

Goal 4.

Prioritize the mental health of families by offering accessible, multi-generational services to both children and parents/caregivers.

Goal 4 Actions:

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- 4.1. Promote the importance and availability of parental behavioral health services with information and resources on the connection to early childhood health and well-being.
- 4.2. Expand maternal health services and improve outcomes for new parents through initiatives that support their unique needs during the postpartum transition period.
- 4.3. Conduct an environmental scan of available behavioral health services for new parents, infants, and young children, and identify policies and strategies, such as expanding Medicaid codes, to make these services more widely available and accessible to all.
- 4.4. Expand mandated supporter training programs to include guidance on responding to substance use concerns during periods of pregnancy and postpartum.
- 4.5. Train early childhood primary care providers across the state to better recognize and effectively make referrals related to parental mental health.
- 4.6. Support holistic recovery of children who have lived through natural disasters by addressing physical and mental health needs.

Goal 5.

Ensure families experience trusted interactions across the continuum of early childhood services.

Goal 5 Actions:

- 5.1. Train early childhood professionals to better understand and identify ways to provide linguistically and diverse-ability-appropriate experiences.
- 5.2. Communicate in ways that are responsive to the unique needs and preferences of children and families and that help build trust between professionals and families. Work with families to understand and leverage existing trusted resources in the community.
- 5.3. Connect children and families to needed services by partnering with community mutual-aid networks and faith-based organizations.
- 5.4. Increase access to bilingual translation and education services for children ages birth to 5 and their families.
- 5.5. Develop multi-lingual and easily understandable parent education materials and resources for all birth to 5 services and settings.