

1 Coordinated State Leadership

Adapting State Governance to Coordinate and Align Early Learning and Development Services

Coordinating the planning, implementation, and management of the many components of an early learning and development system is an ongoing challenge for all states, although no two have the exact same configuration.⁴ While this topic was not suggested for state team discussions, it permeated many of their conversations. Some teams needed time to share information and discuss developments prompted by new federal funding for advisory councils and home visiting programs. Many wanted to discuss how the new pieces would relate to existing state programs and initiatives, and how to ensure consistency and communication within the state.

Each state has its own unique mix of agencies that govern programs relevant to promoting early learning and development, which are often spread across education; health, human, or social services; child welfare and foster care; workforce and family assistance; substance abuse and mental health programs; and other departments. While some key grants and programs are located within a particular state agency due to federal requirements, states often have significant latitude to determine the lead agency responsible for other activities. For example, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grants are funded through Maternal and Child Health lead

agencies while governors have been given discretion to determine the lead agency to administer the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) program, and Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). More recently, governors were able to select the lead agency for the new Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood home visiting funds authorized in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (known as the Affordable Care Act). Other critical programs are federal grants to local authorities, such as the Head Start and Early Head Start program, with additional federal funds used to place Head Start State Collaboration Directors at the state level. States have developed a variety of interagency bodies to improve coordination of children's services at the state level, such as Children's Cabinets and public or private councils at the state and regional levels. Counties, cities, and neighborhoods also have early childhood initiatives of note (see County, City and Neighborhood Initiatives, p. 16). A more recent effort under the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 encouraged state-level coordination by authorizing governors to establish or designate Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs). ECACs support coordination and collaboration of early care and education policy and services for children from birth to



COUNTY, CITY, AND NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVES

Community-level early learning and development systems are important in many states. For example:

- **County governments:** In some states, counties have significant authority to set policy and funding, e.g., nine states give county welfare or social services departments the authority to administer and implement CCDF child care subsidies, which can include eligibility levels. County initiatives have used local tax referendums to raise dedicated funding for early learning and development initiatives, as for instance, in [Palm Beach County, Florida](#).
- **City initiatives:** Cities across the country that have made early learning and development a priority have implemented unique approaches. For example, the [Tulsa Initiative](#) is a public-private partnership that uses a two-generation approach to break the cycle of poverty in low-income neighborhoods.
- **Independent neighborhood-based efforts:** Intensive, coordinated, local hubs of support for children and families dot the country. One example is [Harlem's Children's Zone](#) on which the new ED [Federal Promise Neighborhood](#) grants are modeled.

school entry age in three areas: professional development, research-based early learning standards and guidelines, and development of a unified data collection system. To the maximum extent possible, ECACs should have governor-appointed representatives from:

- the agency responsible for child care;
- the state education agency;
- local education agencies;
- institutions of higher education in the state;
- local providers of early childhood education and development services;
- Head Start agencies, including migrant and seasonal Head Start programs and Indian Head Start programs;
- the state director of Head Start Collaboration;
- the state agency responsible for programs under Part B, Section 619 or Part C of the IDEA;
- the state agency responsible for health or mental health care; and
- other entities the governor determines relevant.⁵

States may expand the focus to include additional members and to address a broader scope of tasks (see *State Early Childhood Advisory Councils*, p. 22). The potential impact of these councils was increased when Congress attached funding to this provision. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) provided \$100 million over three years for ECACs. No state will receive less than \$500,000. As of April 2011, 45 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and three territories have submitted plans and received funding.⁶

Efforts to encourage state-level coordination and alignment across agencies are also embedded in several other ongoing federal initiatives.⁷ For example, federally funded Head Start

Collaboration state directors have been situated in all states since 1990. When the ECCS grants began in 2003, the 48 states and four territories that received funding were required to increase coordination and collaboration in five key service areas: access to health care and medical homes; social-emotional development and mental health; early care and education; parent education; and family support. Since the establishment of the Part C early intervention program under IDEA, all states have established State Interagency Coordinating Councils (SICCs) to advise and assist in the implementation of Part C for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. In addition, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's (SAMHSA) Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health) initiative to promote wellness birth to age 8 began in 2008. Seventeen states now have LAUNCH grants that require state-level Child Wellness Councils.

State leaders have to take all of the above into account when designing an integrated early learning and development system that meets unique state needs and priorities. Some focus on the core task of improving coordination and alignment among the array of early care and education programs. Some examine how to better serve an increasingly diverse child population with numerous cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, **Maryland's ECAC Three-Year Action Plan** is intentionally looking to increase cultural sensitivity and outreach to minority and immigrant children in state early childhood services.⁸ Other states are moving beyond early care and education from birth to age 5 to include additional services or age groups. At present, only the **District of Columbia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania** hold governance of child care subsidy, quality initiatives, licensing, state-funded pre-kindergarten, and Part C and Part B, Section

619 of IDEA within one agency.⁹ However, it may be impractical to consolidate responsibility for a comprehensive system that also includes health and family support services. Therefore, many states are building comprehensive systems by aligning core components like standards for children's growth and development, professional development, quality program standards, and data systems.¹⁰

Some innovative efforts described in EC 2010 discussions and the subsequent exploration of related issues for this report include:

- Developing linkages across child and family services and supports such as early care and education; early intervention and special education; health, including behavioral health; nutrition; and family support.
- Creating a policy and practice framework for a prenatal through age 8 continuum.
- Leveraging new policy and funding opportunities presented by ECACs.

Developing Linkages Across Child and Family Services and Supports *(That Include: Early Care and Education; Early Intervention and Special Education; Health, including Behavioral Health; Nutrition; and Family Support)*

As understanding of early childhood development has grown, so has the need to build governance structures that work across the often separate systems that provide child and family services. In the past, a key challenge facing states was the development of better coordination between the core of early learning programs (i.e., child care; state preschool; Part C and Part B, Section 619 of IDEA services) and federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs. While this

remains a critical issue, some states want to expand governance structures beyond that core to include the broadest range of early learning and development services and relevant stakeholders.

Sharing authority across sectors: Some state leaders aim to coordinate policymaking across the early learning, family support, early intervention and special education, health (including behavioral health), and nutrition systems. These state leaders are building on concepts developed by the Early Childhood Systems Working Group in 2006 and adapted by the [BUILD Initiative](#) and other technical assistance providers.¹¹ For example, **Ohio's** governor had already established an [Early Childhood Cabinet](#) in 2007 composed of department heads of alcohol and drug addiction services, education, health, job and family services, mental health, and developmental disabilities. When the [ECAC](#) was created in 2008, it advised the Cabinet and the governor's office, with staffing that was shared by the Cabinet, Head Start State Collaboration and state ECCS initiative directors. These meetings included educational presentations about the array of relevant programs and

discussions intended to build understanding of unfamiliar systems and programs.¹²

Other examples of state agencies that regularly share authority include **Wisconsin**, where the ECAC is co-chaired by the Department of Children and Families secretary and the state superintendent of public instruction. Wisconsin state agencies have developed cross-agency agreements and share responsibility for key issues. For example, the Department of Health Services (which administers Part C of IDEA services for infants and toddlers) and the Department of Public Instruction (which administers Section 619 of IDEA special education) have a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) to improve coordination and transitions between the two programs, and a new agreement to govern a data tracking system.

Sharing authority for early childhood governance with local public or private boards or partnerships: At least 10 states have created state-to-local structures designed to share key decisions and authority with locally driven boards or partnerships.¹³ This structure can engage new stakeholders in planning and advocating for early childhood services while allowing for unique policies and programs that are responsive to local conditions and populations. Some initiatives involve new state funding and others are responsible for collaboration that ensures a more effective use of existing funding.¹⁴ For example, **California's** First Five is funded by a 50-cent per-pack cigarette tax that generates about \$590 million a year. The majority (80 percent) of the funding goes to county boards that determine funding allocations to areas such as parent education; child care provider education; immunizations; prenatal and postnatal maternal and infant nutrition; child development, health care and social services not provided by existing programs; education and



training on the avoidance of tobacco, drugs and alcohol during pregnancy; and domestic violence prevention and treatment.¹⁵

North Carolina was one of the first states to pass [legislation](#) that created a state-to-local partnership model, which has become the state's early childhood infrastructure. A statewide nonprofit organization oversees the [Smart Start](#) network of 77 local partnerships that serve all 100 North Carolina counties. Local partnerships bridge education, health services, and family support systems. They convene stakeholders to assess local needs; determine how best to meet mandated outcomes; ensure accountability; and leverage community, state, and federal resources. A minimum of 30 percent of funding is dedicated to help low-income children access quality child care. The remainder of the funding may be used to improve child care quality; parenting education; family literacy; connecting children to enhance health services; and other comprehensive services. At the state level, Smart Start leaders regularly partner with the NC Division of Child Development and NC Department of Public Instruction. This infrastructure allows North Carolina policymakers to collect data, implement strategic initiatives, and [report results](#) statewide.¹⁶

Coordinating a one-stop local entry point to the system for families: Developing an integrated entry point to key early learning and development services at the local level is another approach to integrating state early learning and development systems. For example, **Vermont** has developed a [Children's Integrated Services \(CIS\)](#) model that fully integrates a set of services for families with children from the prenatal period to age 6 that includes: Part C early intervention; maternal and child health home visiting (called nursing and family support); early childhood and family mental health services; and child care

subsidy supports for children with special needs and those in protective services through regional collaborative CIS teams. These services are administered by the state's Child Development Division. Three areas of the state are now piloting fully integrated services at the regional level with blended funding and common intake and referral in place. As of November 1, 2010, all 12 regions are required to use the document entitled "One Plan" to manage the intake and planning for services process. The CIS model provides one early childhood prevention and early interventionist to support a family, backed by a multi-disciplinary team of additional professionals with early childhood expertise.¹⁷ Meeting weekly, the state CIS Team members provide ongoing technical assistance to the pilot regions as well as to the other regions of the state.¹⁸

Creating a Policy and Practice Framework for a Prenatal through Age Eight Continuum

EC 2010 sought to highlight the importance of integrating or aligning services and systems from the prenatal period through age 8. There is growing recognition that this entire period of development is critical for children. Follow-up in fifth grade on children who participated in the first wave of Early Head Start has shown that better academic skill outcomes were associated with more positive early learning and development experiences in all three age periods: birth to age 3, preschool-age, and the early elementary years (through fifth grade). Specifically, there was a cumulative positive relationship for those children who participated in Early Head Start (for at least 2.5 years), took part in a formal preschool program (such as Head Start, state prekindergarten or licensed child care) at ages 3 and 4, and then attended a more economically diverse elementary school (measured in terms of the proportion of the population eligible for free and

reduced price lunches).¹⁹ Other studies (e.g., the Abecedarian Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Center Study, and the National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project) can be interpreted as supporting alignment between and transition from early childhood and elementary school to strengthen outcomes for young children who have participated in preschool-age early care and education initiatives.²⁰

The focus age range of early learning and development system activities is evolving in states. National foundations have played an influential role in supporting state work. Some states are focused on early childhood by improving quality and alignment among preschool programs. Major investment by the [Pew Charitable Trusts](#) has fueled pre-kindergarten campaigns in several states. Some of these states now want to expand their focus to include infants and toddlers. Several foundations formed a [Birth to Five Policy Alliance](#) to support that approach by making targeted grants in states and supporting technical assistance. Other foundations, such as the [Foundation for Child Development](#), have funded research and support to states to implement a preschool-to-3rd grade framework.²¹ A prenatal-through-age-8 framework, which includes all the aforementioned approaches, is just now emerging in states.

Addressing the needs of infants and toddlers and expectant mothers: All children experience high-quality service gaps, but none more so than the youngest children. To address this, a few states (e.g., **Connecticut**, **Maryland** and **Washington**) have convened stakeholder committees to review existing policies about infants and toddlers and to develop statewide strategic plans. For example, **Pennsylvania** convened an Infant-Toddler Systems Committee for the state Early Learning Council that produced a 2010 [report](#) with specific recommendations to improve quality and

integration of services.²² One recommendation was to develop a high-quality statewide infant-toddler service program for vulnerable infants and toddlers.²³ The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Learning (OCDEL) was the first state agency to seek and win a federal Early Head Start expansion grant. A separate but coordinated state birth-to-age-3 initiative entitled [Keystone Babies](#) is using ARRA funds to raise quality program standards for infants and toddlers in selected child care centers. **Washington's** Department of Early Learning (DEL) and Thrive by Five submitted a [comprehensive plan](#) to the legislature in December 2010 that outlined concrete recommendations important for infants and toddlers in health, family engagement and support, child care subsidy, and professional development system policy.²⁴

Strengthening preschool-through-grade-3 alignment: Another area of interest for states is the improvement of transitions and alignment between early learning settings, from birth through third grade.²⁵ Some EC 2010 participants sought to engage strong leaders within state education in early learning and development issues. Federal programs encourage such connections. For example, federal Head Start programs are mandated to “take steps to coordinate with the local education agency...to promote continuity of services and effective transitions.”²⁶ Schools receiving Title I funding have transition coordination requirements. The U.S. Department of Education has underscored the need for schools to partner with early childhood programs by including transitions to kindergarten among invitational priorities for states applying for [Race to the Top](#) grants and as part of a competitive priority to improve early learning outcomes in the [Investing in Innovation](#) grants available to local education agencies and community-based organizations.

Some EC 2010 participants highlighted the importance of connecting early childhood stakeholders with elementary school principals. For example, **North Carolina's Ready Schools Initiative** has been developed with active leadership from state education and early childhood leaders. Based on recommendations from a task force collaboratively convened by the superintendent of education, the director of the state prekindergarten program, and the president of **Smart Start**, the state has adopted a **definition of "Ready Schools."** This definition specifically includes the goal of increasing connections with early education providers through increased communication and coordination between early care and education and elementary school teachers, as well as transition activities such as home visits and staggered entry for the youngest grades. All elementary schools are encouraged to create local Ready Schools **planning groups**. They must include their local Smart Start Partnership representatives and early childhood education providers along with school leaders, and they may receive consulting support through the state Smart Start network. A **map** shows where Ready Schools activities are occurring.

Creating a continuum that links policies and programs from prenatal through grade 3: New approaches are emerging in some states to look across policies and programs from the prenatal stage through grade 3. For example, **Colorado** developed a comprehensive birth-through-age-8 Early Childhood **Policy Framework** in 2008 that is used to guide the ECAC Council, policy priorities, and development of an early childhood system. Over 50 stakeholder groups and state agencies reviewed and approved the 2008 framework, which outlines early learning; family support and parent education; social, emotional, and mental health; and physical health desired outcomes.



EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITIES INITIATIVES

The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development has developed a discussion document defining place-based initiatives to provide comprehensive and continuous early childhood services for pregnant women and children from birth to age 8. Elements of a coordinated Early Learning Community would include:

- A **governance structure or coordinated system of planning** that is composed of representatives from the public and private sector, parents, schools, community-based organizations, child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and home visitation as well as health, mental health, child welfare, family support, and disability services.
- A **system of data collection** that provides accurate and current information on the status and well-being of pregnant women, young children, and their families and the services available to them.
- A **quality assurance system** that measures the quality of services delivered to pregnant women, young children, and families and provides information, incentives, and support for continuous improvement.
- A **school system that is ready for children** and has a strong connection to the early learning community to facilitate a seamless transition to school and to ensure continuity.

Source: Administration for Children and Families (ACF), What is the Early Learning Communities Initiative? <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/earlychildhood>, (n.d.).

Leveraging the Opportunities Presented by ECACs

ECACs have raised expectations among state leaders. Although ECACs are advisory, they must be designated by the governor, include specific members, and address certain activities. States must provide 70 percent matching funds to receive federal funding for 30 percent of the costs.²⁷

STATE EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCILS

ECACs are responsible for a set of tasks. They must:

- Conduct periodic statewide needs assessments on the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services from birth to school entry.
- Identify opportunities for and barriers to collaboration and coordination.
- Facilitate the development or enhancement of high-quality systems of early childhood education and care designed to improve school readiness.

ECACs are asked to make recommendations that:

- Increase participation in child care and early education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.
- Develop a unified data collection system for public early childhood and development programs and services.
- Develop statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood education to include assessing capacity and effectiveness of institutions of higher education that support the development of early childhood educators.
- Improve state early learning guidelines. States must undertake efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning guidelines, as appropriate.

Source: ACF, State Advisory Councils Fact Sheet, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/earlychildhood/docs/>, (n.d.).

Many EC 2010 participants expressed hope that ECACs could be leveraged to move toward more integrated governance systems responsive to each state's particular needs and history. Some state leaders are working to identify system-building activity priorities, given fiscal constraints and changes in gubernatorial leadership following the November 2010 elections.²⁸

Incorporating ECACs into a consolidated early care and education governance structure:

In some cases, the ECACs fit into relatively new and consolidated state departments or divisions with responsibility for multiple early care and education programs as well as for housing the Head Start State Collaboration Office. For example, the **Washington Department of Early Learning** (DEL) has direct responsibility for a range of programs, including child care licensing and monitoring; state-funded preschool; child care subsidy policy; IDEA Part C early intervention services; Head Start State Collaboration Office; the new Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood home visiting program; and a state grant to 13 school districts to support preschool-through-grade-3 partnerships. DEL is also a collaborating partner in the state's \$17.3 million federal award to develop an extensive longitudinal data system development.²⁹ The governor selected DEL as the lead agency to apply for and administer the federal ECAC grant because the agency already houses a state early learning advisory council.³⁰ In July 2010, DEL released an **Early Learning Plan** that addressed a broad array of child-serving agencies.

Using ECACs to fuel existing cross-agency efforts:

Most states must address the new ECAC requirements without any major restructuring. EC 2010 attendees worked for years to improve their state systems through past federal efforts such as ECCS, SICC required under IDEA, or

SAMHSA's Project LAUNCH grants. Several considered adding ECAC members not specified by federal requirements (such as the state Medicaid director; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agency; and the IDEA Part C early intervention and Part B, Section 619 early childhood special education coordinators).

Some EC 2010 participants pointed out that some past integration efforts worked best with ownership at high levels in state government and a willingness to be innovative while meeting federal rules. In other states, the knowledge, dedication, and longevity of middle managers who had participated in each coordinated effort will likely continue to be the engine of system-building.³¹ These middle managers may hope to build on preexisting governance entities so ECACs can move directly into implementing plans developed before.³² At least eight states have designated their ECCS groups to be the new ECACs. For example, **Kansas**' governor did so quickly, implementing an existing ECCS plan already supported by a cross-section of agencies and stakeholders. This decision brought new funding resources to infrastructure development that would not otherwise have been available to the ECCS plan.³³ **Illinois** established a Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development through Executive Order to coordinate efforts of the Illinois Early Learning Council, a long-standing group that is now the designated ECAC. The office works across state agencies to assist in the implementation of council activities and to develop initiatives that address and promote access, quality, and accountability in early childhood programs.³⁴

Using ECACs as an opportunity to engage new partners in discrete system-building activities:

Many state leaders are working to make the most of the three-year opportunity presented by the ECACs and federal funding. Several pointed out how difficult it normally is to finance staffing of cross-agency coordination and planning, especially with tight state budgets. Federal dollars can be used creatively to further state priorities. Initial analysis of ECAC plans indicates that many states plan to use associated funds to build core elements, especially integrated data, quality improvement, or professional development systems. Many of these are intent on building integrated data systems.³⁵

States are **coordinating state leadership** to align early learning and development services by:

- Developing linkages across child and family services and supports, including early care and education; early intervention and special education; health, including behavioral health; nutrition; and family support.
- Creating a policy and practice framework for a prenatal-through-age-8 continuum.
- Leveraging new policy and funding opportunities presented by Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs).