

Kentucky Governor's Office
of Early Childhood's
**Biennial Report
on the State Plan
of the Early Childhood
Advisory Council**

June 30, 2023

Background

The original goals of the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood include:

- Promoting greater collaboration
- Emphasizing quality and continuous improvement
- Ensuring more children enter kindergarten prepared.

Building a better Kentucky starts with making sure all children have a strong start. The mission of this office is to provide leadership and direction for the commonwealth with the goal of maintaining a comprehensive and sustainable prenatal to age five early childhood system.

As an education-first administration, Team Kentucky starts with ensuring that all children have high quality experiences before they enter kindergarten. This is how we build a Kentucky where our people can create a better life through quality jobs, world-class education opportunities, quality health care and strong infrastructure.

Impact and State Strategic Plan

In 2019, the office received and implemented a \$10.6 million federal grant which led to the development of the 2019-2024 statewide strategic plan. Fiscal mapping activities, also completed during the planning grant, underscored the infrastructure challenges for early childhood in Kentucky. With three early childhood oversight entities at the state level, the need for aligned and unified investments and collaborative partnerships was apparent. Since that time, there has been a global pandemic. With support of leadership, priorities were refocused and streamlined. Staff re-organized around core functions: promoting the state's vision for high-quality and better access to child care, as well as shared measurement and alignment of strategies and resources. More than ever, there is an elevated focus on aligning investments among all early child care oversight entities for impact, workforce content expertise, and field support for impact and innovation in communities. Even though Kentucky was not awarded the second round of the federal grant, the office still advanced the goals identified

from the strategic plan during the pandemic. Highlights from the Commonwealth's recent progress include:

Addressing the Teacher Shortage

Kentucky developed one of the first in the nation Registered Apprenticeship pathways for early childhood instructors and directors. The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood serves as an intermediary providing program oversight, serves as point of contact, and works alongside the Office of Employer and Apprentice Services to connect employer partners to apprentices, facilitate communication and collaboration between employer partners and the apprentices, help employer partners navigate the process and ensure that they have the resources and support they need to develop successful apprenticeship programs.

This time-tested method for individuals to learn, develop and succeed in a particular occupation include On-the-Job Training, Related Technical Instruction, Wage Progression, Mentoring and a Nationally Recognized Portable Certification. The inaugural class had over 70 practitioners.

High Quality Services Starting with its Professionals

The Kentucky Early Childhood Standards serve as a framework to guide early care, intervention for education professionals, administrators, and others in understanding what children are able to know and do from birth through four years of age. The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood worked in collaboration with experts in the field to update the standards, develop a unified training and technical assistance, and rollout a statewide plan. The formal launch was held in summer 2022. The comprehensive, state-wide launch included practical tools and resources in multiple formats. Those included an interactive web-based tool and an updated user-friendly tool for families and caregivers.

Uniting the most effective organizations and influencers around the critical early years of a child's life

An elevated focus has been placed on local partnerships that promote school readiness. The following are examples of improvements to date:

- For the first time, defined and documented nearly ten strategies that demonstrate improved impact at kindergarten entry; investment in these proven strategies was increased from 1.2 million annually to 3.4 million annually to grow proven strategies.
- Commissioned a report to inform a strategic plan to most effectively spend \$8 million in surplus tobacco settlement funds that was designated to expand and enhance the reach and sustainability of developmental screening in Kentucky to build strong social and emotional skills.
- For the first time since its inception in 2014, the state's early childhood training institute was re-envisioned and was evolved from an annual event to targeted and high-quality series of cross-sector trainings with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services and The Kentucky Department for Education.
- Increased peer-to-peer learning, outreach, technical assistance, data labs and trainings, webinar participation has increased from averaging 50 participants to averaging 150 participants and the number of Kentucky Counties being served has increased from 99 counties to 106 counties.

In 2022, Kentucky applied for and secured a \$36 million Preschool Development Grant from the Administration of Children and Families. The Governor designated the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood as the entity that will have responsibility for execution and administration of the grant for Kentucky. The federal funds will help the commonwealth advance and accelerate its work through :

1. Using data to invest in and implement strategies that intentionally accelerate outcomes

2. Addressing the early childhood teacher shortage and
3. Expanding access to and quality care for those children most at risk.

Description

In 1998, states attorneys general and the United States' largest tobacco companies agreed to a settlement that reimburses states for past tobacco-related costs. Under the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), the companies agreed to begin annual payments in 1999 in perpetuity worth approximately \$208 billion to states and territories, including Kentucky, that are signatories to the agreement. In Kentucky, 25% of the annual Tobacco MSA funds are dedicated to various Early Childhood Development Initiatives.

In 2009, the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Development and Education recommended establishing the Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council and the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood to promote an early childhood framework to partner with Kentucky's state agencies, communities, and families to ensure kindergarten readiness for Kentucky children. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 requires every state to establish an advisory council.

Priorities

The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood serves as the umbrella organization that unifies early childhood partners to achieve better messaging, coordination, alignment, execution of efficiencies, and to best prevent fragmented funding for early childhood initiatives in Kentucky. With and through cross-sector partners throughout the commonwealth, the office leads the innovative and ambitious work to support working families in need of child care, thus ensuring children have a strong start in life, school, and go on to help support the growth of Kentucky's economy.

The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood is the primary entity that oversees

the Head Start Collaboration Office, the Quality Rating and Improvement System, the Early Childhood Standards, and the Early Childhood Career Lattice.

Across the country, the way states structure various early childhood programs, services and agencies varies significantly. In Kentucky, the Early Childhood Advisory Council, along with its support office the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood, serve as the coordinating body for the three early child oversight entities. This includes the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, the Kentucky Department of Education and the Education and Labor Cabinet (30+ agencies).

Funding Sources

- Tobacco Settlement Funds
- Head Start Collaborative Office
- Preschool Development Grant

Funding priorities for the next two years include but are not limited to:

1. Increasing unification and accountability of the Early Childhood System including but not limited to:
 - Intensifying alignment efforts to overcome fragmented funding.
 - Growing the early childhood workforce pipeline, accelerating advancement and retaining high-quality educators.
2. Strengthening and cultivating state and local partnerships.
 - Aligning birth-to-5 programs and strategies, reducing duplication, and leveraging additional resources to ensure children have a strong start in their communities.

Collaborating with the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) on Early Childhood Profile to connect prevention services along the birth-to-5 pathway to increase access and opportunity.

- Using data to invest in and implement strategies that intentionally accelerate outcomes.
- To inform actions and improve outcomes in local communities around the Commonwealth.

Executing and administering the \$36 million three-year Preschool Development Grant awarded by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families to help support the original goals of the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood: promote greater collaboration, emphasize quality and continuous improvement, and ensure more children enter kindergarten prepared. With and through our cross-sector partners, our office will continue to transform the Commonwealth into the best place to start and raise a family.