

Commonwealth of Kentucky
Community Early Childhood Council Evaluation Study
July 2017

Overview

Ghazvini Consulting Services responded to a solicitation from the Commonwealth of Kentucky and was awarded a contract to complete a Community Early Childhood Council Evaluation Study to commence on July 1 and to be completed by July 31, 2017. The approved evaluation design included conducting two on-line surveys, one for CECC members and one for CECC Request for Application reviewers; interviews with CECC leadership; a review of state-local partnerships in other states; a review of standards and system components in Kentucky; an analysis of findings; development of recommendations based on the findings; and a revised draft CECC Request for Application based on the recommendations. The following report documents the work as required. A revised draft CECC Request for Application is provided separately.

Analysis of Community Early Childhood Council Surveys

Introduction

Community Early Childhood Councils (CECCs) were established in Kentucky in KIDS NOW legislation in 2000. During the 2016-17 fiscal year, 75 councils serving 110 of Kentucky's 120 counties were awarded \$1,274,113.64 (one council returned their funding after the awards were released). The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood works in partnership with the councils to mobilize local community members to build innovative, collaborative partnerships that promote school readiness for children and families. CECCs bring local perspective and assets to Kentucky's early childhood system development and implementation. Council members work together to identify local needs, develop strategies to address those needs that maximize state and local resources, and measure their progress.

CECCs apply annually for funding through a written Request for Application process. The focus of the grants has changed moderately over the years, and this evaluation of the funding system is the first one that has been completed. The Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood completed a formal procurement process to identify a third-party reviewer to evaluate the method and process of local council funding and make recommendations to better align the state-local partnership with Kentucky's goal of school readiness.

Method

A survey was developed to solicit input from local CECC members regarding the state required processes and requirements relative to local council operations. Survey questions addressed the Request for Application, local council operations, reporting requirements, and perceived local impact. Experts in research design recommend using multiple methods of feedback to increase

the effectiveness of evaluation design.¹ As a result, this evaluation utilized interviews in addition to on-line surveys. More in-depth input was sought through interviews with CECC leaders. At least two leaders (typically the chair, co-chair, past-chair, Secretary, and/or Treasurer) from a sample of 29 CECCs were invited to participate in an interview. A separate interview protocol was developed for Request for Application reviewers to garner their input regarding the application processes. Copies of the survey and interview questions are included in Appendix A. The following is the findings relative to each of these evaluation efforts.

CECC Member Survey

Respondents

Email invitations with a link to complete an on-line survey were successfully sent to 1,192 individuals who served as a CECC member during fiscal years 2015-16 and/or 2016-17². Two hundred and sixty-one individuals responded to the survey, a response rate of 22%. Online survey response rates vary from 10% to 30%, on average, and this response allows a 95% confidence level with a 5.5 percent margin of error. Determining the response rates from single versus multi-county councils is difficult, as approximately 25% of respondents did not respond to the question asking for the name of their CECC. However, approximately 40% of the respondents replied 'not applicable' to a question that specifically addressed multi-county councils. Therefore, it appears that there was a good balance of responses between CECC members representing single-county and multi-county councils.

¹ Nulty, D. D. (2008). The adequacy of response rates to online and paper surveys: What can be done? In *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33 (3), 301-317.

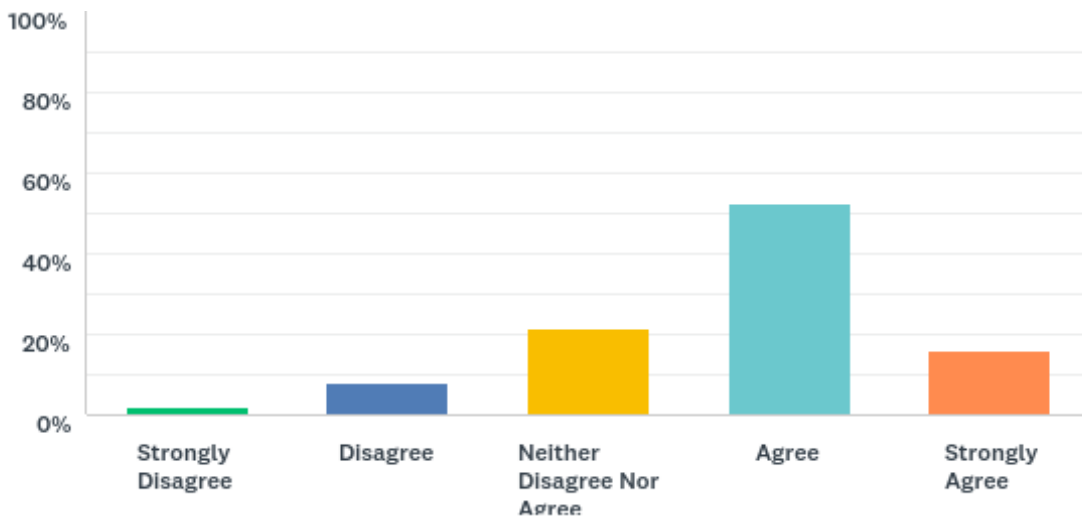
² Due to an incomplete electronic list, not all 2015 CECC Members were sent a survey.

Results

Application Processes

Most respondents replied favorable to questions regarding the Request for Applications. Approximately 82% agreed or strongly agreed that the RFA process is fair and equitable with only 5% responding disagree or strongly disagree (approximately 13% neither agreed nor disagreed). Similar responses were given when asked if the funding process was equitable for both new and returning CECCs.

Figure 1. CECC Member Perceptions of Review Process Transparency.



There were slight differences in responses when asked about the transparency of the review process with approximately 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing to the transparency of the process and approximately 10% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (see Figure 1). Similar response rates were found to the question addressing the clarity of the review scoring parameters (65% were in agreement that it was clear and understandable, and 11% disagreed). When asked about the fairness of the review process, 74% agreed or strongly agreed that it was fair, and 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Other questions addressed the clarity of wording in the RFA and the timeline. A summary of these responses is included in Table 1.

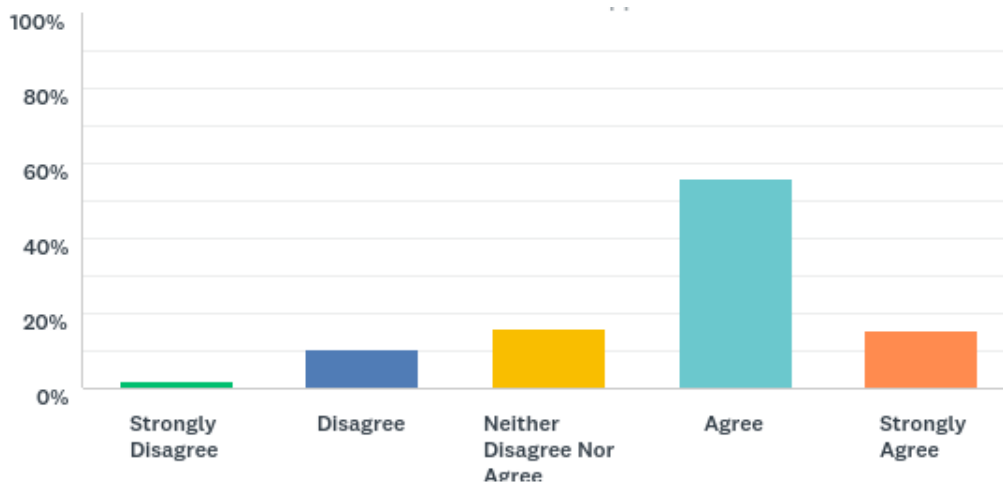
Table 1. CECC Member Survey Responses regarding the Request for Applications.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The goals and requirements of the RFA are understandable	14%	62%	15.5%	7.5%	1%
Terminology in the RFA is defined and clearly understood	14%	56%	20%	8%	2%
The RFA timeline for response is appropriate	13%	52%	17%	14%	4%

State Supports to Community Early Childhood Councils

Once again, the majority of responses were favorable regarding state-level supports provided to local councils. When asked about the frequency of communication between the Kentucky Governor’s Office of Early Childhood and local councils, 72% were satisfied and only 12% were dissatisfied (see Figure 2). The responses were very similar to a question regarding satisfaction with the communication methods and mechanisms.

Figure 2. CECC Member Perceptions of Communication Frequency.



Several questions were asked about training and technical assistance supports provided to local councils. There was a slight increase in dissatisfaction. There were significant differences in responses between single-county and multi-county councils regarding the two questions relative to the provision of technical assistance to councils. In terms of both the sufficiency and quality of technical assistance opportunities, there was significantly ($p < .05$) greater agreement to these statements by multi-county respondents. Table 2 provides an overview of these responses.

Table 2. CECC Survey Responses regarding Training and Technical Assistance.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Training provided to CECCs is sufficient	12.5%	46%	24%	14.5%	3%
Training provided to CECCs is of high quality	15%	44%	33%	6%	2%
Technical assistance provided to CECCs is sufficient	11%	49%	31%	7%	2%
Technical assistance provided to CECCs is of high quality	9%	47%	36.5%	6.5%	1%

CECC members were asked about School Readiness Summit participation. The School Readiness Summits seek to give Superintendents and/or Assistant Superintendents the opportunity to lead a collaborative team of representatives from child care, Preschool, Head Start, CECC, and other district and community partners to create 30, 60, and 90 day Action Plans to increase school readiness in their communities. For the 2016 School Readiness Summit and the Mid-Year School Readiness Summit, Quality Improvement Grant funding was available to

assist with plan implementation. Since 2015, Kentucky has hosted two School Readiness Summits as well as a Mid-Year School Readiness Summit with a total of 46 districts represented.

When CECC members were asked whether the School Readiness Summit provided helpful support to the work of CECCs, 46% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, 7.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 22% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 24.5% responded that the question was not applicable. There was also a significant difference in responses on this question between single and multi-county councils ($p < .05$) with single-county councils less likely to agree (34%) than multi-county councils (53.5%), perhaps due to multi-county councils having more potential invitations to participate in a Summit than their single-county colleagues.

Funding and Reporting Requirements

Council members also answered favorably to questions regarding funding and reporting requirements. Most respondents agreed that the CECC funding formula was clear (61% agreed or strongly agreed, 10% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 29% seemed unsure, indicating neither agree nor disagree) and that funding requirements and processes were clear (69% were in agreement, 8.5% were in disagreement and 22.5% neither agreed nor disagreed). The budget amendment process is also clear according to the majority of respondents (69.5% in agreement and 7% in disagreement).

Overall reporting requirements are clear according to the majority of respondents with 75% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 6.5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. There was also strong agreement that reporting requirements effectively communicate the progress and impact of local council work (69.5% agreeing, 6% disagreeing, and 24.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing). Mid-year correction and improvement processes were identified as

helpful, with 65% in agreement and 4.5% in disagreement (over 30% appeared unsure).

When asked about the appropriateness of data collection requirements, 78% of respondents were in agreement that such requirements were appropriate, with only 6% disagreeing. Slightly more favorable responses were found when respondents were asked if the data collected was useful to Council work (82% in agreement and only 3% in disagreement).

Perceptions regarding Council Work

Respondents replied very favorably to questions regarding the local value of their work. Members strongly agreed with the statement that the CECC work is valuable to the community (64% indicated strongly agree, 31% responded agree, less than 1% indicated disagree, and less than 1% responded strongly disagree). When asked if their CECC provides high quality and effective work, 49.5% strongly agreed and 42% agreed. Only 3% disagreed with this statement. Responses were very similar to a statement about the community recognizing the value of school readiness (89% in agreement and 5% in disagreement).

One question asked if the CECC effectively used volunteers in the community, and again, responses were very favorable (79.5% agreed and 8.5% disagreed). Another question was directed specifically to multi-county councils and asked whether each county was sufficiently represented and addressed in council planning and implementation of goals. Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated that the question was not applicable, and thus are likely from single-county coalitions. Removing those respondents from the response yields a favorable response rate with 66% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement and 11% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement (23% responded neither agree nor disagree).

Open-ended Questions

Three open-ended questions were asked regarding the strengths, challenges, and system recommendations. A summary of responses to these questions is provided below.

What do you see as the major strengths of the CECC system?

Most responses spoke to the roles of CECCs in bringing the community partners together and in advancing school readiness awareness. Increased community collaboration with a multitude of different partners was noted often as well as outreach and support to families with young children. Respondents noted that the council helps partners prioritize, reduce duplication, and better share and leverage resources. Several respondents noted the importance of local planning and decision-making in order to meet the diverse local needs across Kentucky. The importance of supporting early literacy, outreach to hard-to-reach families, increased community involvement and awareness, and additional funding to support the development of young children and their families was noted.

What do you see as the major challenges of the CECC system?

Common responses to this question addressed the difficulty of getting sufficient numbers of council members involved and assisting with council activities and the need for additional funding. Many respondents noted that the majority of Council work is completed by a relatively small number of members. The volunteer nature of the work was noted as a contributing factor to the difficulty of getting council work completed. Several respondents reported that the requirements were too demanding and there is too much paperwork for a volunteer board. One respondent suggested that funding is needed for paid staff to ensure proper tracking of data collection and outcomes. Concerns were also raised about the difficulty of getting child care providers and some other

partners (e.g., business and government representatives) to participate on the councils.

In addition to the challenge of limited funding, several respondents addressed challenges relative to changes and delays in funding timelines, lack of communication regarding funding issues, the uncertainty of funding, gaps in funding, and the negative impact of funding delays on local efforts. Many of the responses noted challenges relative to data collection. Several respondents noted the recent change in priorities that removed the councils' ability to utilize funding to support professional development for child care providers as a concern.

Difficulties in reaching some families and in getting families involved in council activities were raised. Special challenges relative to outreach and transportation were noted for rural areas. Another challenge that was reported related to the difficulty of making an impact given the diversity of families and communities. The special challenges of multi-county councils were noted given the diversity of needs. One respondent also noted the inability to exchange information about specific families due to confidentiality issues.

Concerns regarding the fairness of the Request for Application review process were raised, with one respondent questioning the adequacy of reviewer training and oversight. Several respondents raised concerns regarding the infrequency of communication, training and assistance from the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood as well as the inconsistency in expectations. Turnover of state level staff was noted as a challenge by a few respondents. A few respondents also noted the lack of training and support for local chairs, particularly new ones.

What are your recommendations of improvement to the CECC system?

Respondents recommended a broader array of supports and services, including more programs for infants, for school-age children during out-of-

school time, for the provision of professional development training and supports, and provision of Strengthening Families Framework. A statewide media campaign regarding early brain development was recommended as well as continued focus and supports for hard-to-reach children. There was also a recommendation to focus funding on activities that are intensive and frequent enough in order to improve impact.

Improvements to the Request for Application and funding processes were recommended, specifically addressing consistent timelines and expectations as well as improved reviewer training and protocols and sharing of scoring sheets. One respondent recommended aligning the funding and services of the CECC RFA with the Family Resource Center and the Preschool Partnership Grants as many of the same community members are involved in all three efforts. A two-year funding cycle was also recommended. Additional supports for small, rural counties where grant writers are not readily available to help were also recommended. More local discretion and fewer restrictions on funding were noted.

There were a number of recommendations for improving the relationships between CECCs and the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood. More frequent communications and supports from the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood were requested, including the provision of site visits. Communications regarding staff and policy changes and updates were recommended as well.

Recommendations regarding the provision of training and assistance to new chairs, training regarding council operations (e.g., running a meeting, engaging members, strategic planning), and assistance finding additional funding opportunities were made. Special assistance to struggling councils was recommended. Opportunities to share best practices and network across councils were recommended by numerous respondents. Regular communications from the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood to the

public and stakeholders about the importance of early childhood was recommended.

Opportunities for local councils to meet at the annual statewide conference or via another forum were recommended. One respondent recommended moving the statewide conference to May or early June since the end of June conflicts with the school district closing of the fiscal year budget. One respondent recommended provision of a statewide online data system to simplify local data collection and reporting requirements. Improved monitoring and accountability of local councils was recommended.

Specific to multi-county councils, respondents recommended a requirement for rotation of meetings between counties, assisting counties that want to remain independent, and additional supports to assist with getting all partners to participate.

CECC Request for Application Reviewer Survey

Respondents

Email invitations with a link to complete an on-line survey were successfully sent to 75 individuals who served as a CECC Request for Application reviewer during fiscal years 2015-16 and/or 2016-17. Thirty-nine individuals responded to the survey, a response rate of 52%. This was an excellent response rate given that online survey response rates typically vary from 10% to 30%.

Results

Application Processes

Review respondents replied very favorably to questions regarding the fairness of the Request for Applications. Approximately 85% agreed or strongly agreed that the RFA process is fair and equitable with no one responding that they disagreed or strongly disagreed (approximately 15% neither agreed nor

disagreed). Similar responses were given when asked if the funding process was equitable for both new and returning CECCs (90% agreed or strongly agreed and 10% neither agreed nor disagreed).

Similarly, responses were very favorable when asked about the transparency of the review process with approximately 79.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing to the transparency of the process and approximately 20.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. There was some slight disagreement when asked about the clarity of the RFA. Table 4 provides a summary of responses.

Table 4. Reviewer Perceptions of the Request for Applications.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The goals and requirements of the RFA are understandable for applicants	28%	49%	18%	2.5%	2.5%
The goals and requirements of the RFA are understandable for reviewers	36%	56.5%	5%	2.5%	0
The RFA scoring system is understandable for applicants	24%	55%	18%	3%	0
The RFA scoring system is understandable for reviewers	25.5%	72%	2.5%	0	0
Terminology used in the RFA and the scoring system is defined and clearly understood by all	23%	54%	18%	5%	0

Respondents were also asked about the selection and training process for reviewers. Responses to the statement that there was an appropriate application process and skill level determination for all reviewers included 74.5% agreeing or

strongly agreeing, 20.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 5% disagreeing. Responses were also favorable in terms of the training provided for RFA reviewers (79.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing, 15.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 5% disagreeing). When asked whether the information and materials provided to RFA reviewers were sufficient to complete the review, responses were very favorable (97.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing and only 2.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing).

Review process questions were also included, and respondents were in agreement that the timeline for review was sufficient (92% agreeing or strongly agreeing and only 8% neither agreeing nor disagreeing). Communication between the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood and reviewers was also seen as good (90% agreeing or strongly agreeing, 7.5% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 2.5% disagreeing).

Open-ended Questions

Two open-ended questions were included in the survey, and a summary of responses follows.

What recommendations do you have for improving the RFA documents?

Several of the responses noted the variability in responses from one applicant to the next and the variability in grant writing skills among councils. Recommendations included providing a drop-down menu of choices for particular questions, adding greater clarity to the wording and requirements for those with less grant-writing skill, and providing online training and technical assistance for RFA applicants.

There were also recommendations regarding the content of the RFA. A recommendation was made to encourage a progression from year to year by requiring applicants to summarize successes from the prior year and build a proposal to build upon the successes. Designing the RFA in such a way that the

reviewer can score directly on the application rather than going back and forth between two documents was recommended.

What recommendations do you have for improving the RFA process?

Respondents noted training and technical assistance needs. One respondent noted that there were several RFA responses where the proposed local activities did not align with the RFA requirements relative to goals and deliverables. For some councils, this may suggest the need for additional training and technical assistance, or it could indicate that there is not agreement between local and state entities regarding goals and objectives. It was also a recommendation to require RFA applicants to provide greater explanation and justification regarding local priorities. Several responses encouraged an earlier release of the RFA to allow more local planning and community engagement in the RFA process.

There were several recommendations regarding reviewer selection. A recommendation was made to send an invitation for reviewers to all early childhood higher education faculties. There was also a recommendation to send out the invitation for reviewers earlier to ensure sufficient number of reviewers and time for preparation and training. Ensuring that all reviewers are trained and are knowledgeable of early childhood and the CECC system was recommended.

Online submission and scoring was recommended. There was also a recommendation to ensure that the titles and labels mirror each other on the RFA and the reviewer scoring document to ensure more consistent and faster scoring by the reviewer.

Interviews with CECC Leadership

In order to get more detailed information and input from CECCs and increase confidence in evaluation findings through the use of multiple methods

of data collection, individuals serving in CECC leadership positions were identified. A matrix of CECCs funded during 2015-16 and/or 2016-17 was created to identify councils by single or multiple county representation; rural or urban designation (US Census definitions and designations of rural and urban were used); CECC Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III funding levels; and by Kindergarten Readiness scores (either an average county score above the state average or below the state average). Using a random number calculator, 29 CECCs were selected to participate in the interview sample. An analysis of how the sample fit within the matrix described above was completed to ensure good representation of each category. Good representation across variables was obtained.

Respondents

At least two leaders (typically the chair, co-chair, past-chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and/or Project Coordinator) from the identified 29 CECCs were invited to participate in an interview. A total of 35 interviews took place. Two individuals were interviewed for 6 councils (4 single-county councils and 2 multi-county councils). One individual was interviewed for 23 councils (18 single-county councils and 5 multi-county councils).

The sample included 22 single-county CECCs and 7 multi-county CECCs. A total of 13 urban counties and 31 rural counties were represented across these 29 councils. Seventeen of the councils in the sample were recipients of CECC Tier III or the maximum funding level, with the remaining 12 councils receiving CECC Tier I or II funding levels. Of all the counties represented in the sample, 24 of them had kindergarten readiness rates listed in the 2017 Early Childhood Profile that fell above the state average. The remaining 20 counties had rates that fell below the state average.

Results

The responses were analyzed as a full group and as subgroups of urban versus rural, by funding level, and single-county versus multi-county. No significant differences were found in responses by rural/urban or single-/multi-county. Since multi-county councils often had some counties with Kindergarten Readiness rates above the state average and other county members with rates below the state average, differences in responses based on this variable were not analyzed. Funding level did seem to impact some responses. Whether the council received the maximum level of funding or not did not appear to be the basis for differences; rather, the total amount received appeared more predictive of differences in responses, as highlighted in the analysis that follows.

Application Processes

Several respondents highlighted improvements in the RFA documents. Positive comments addressed the streamlined nature of the documents and the use of drop-down boxes. A few respondents noted the difficulty of the format in terms of fitting all the information into prescribed boxes and columns. Concerns were also noted regarding inconsistency of wording across sections, use of jargon, duplication of information regarding prior council activities, and repetitive information requests. The requirement to get letters of support from all partners was a concern for several of the interviewees, and there were recommendations to allow more local flexibility on this requirement and to only require letters of commitment for *new* partners for councils with prior year approved applications and funding.

Interviewees were also asked about RFA processes. Of the 29 councils represented in the sample, 19 of them highlighted concerns with the timeline of the Request for Application (RFA). Primary among the timeline concerns was the lack of sufficient time for including all council members in the grant planning and writing process, sometimes creating discord among council members

because only a few were involved in the application. Additional concerns related to timing included inconsistency in RFA timelines from year to year, RFA timeline conflicts with end of school activities or start of school activities (preventing involvement of important partners), and lack of communication about timing and due dates. Respondents were also concerned regarding the impact of the timing of the RFA on funding and local activities. Gaps in funding and delays in implementation of activities were noted by several respondents. There were several recommendations to align the RFA with the school fiscal year. It is important to note that this year's RFA was delayed in order to complete this funding system evaluation; this delay likely impacted responses.

In terms of supports provided for the RFA process, two respondents raised concerns regarding delays in response to inquiries, and lack of sufficient training was noted by several respondents, particularly for new chairs and relative to changes in the RFA. The lack of council staffing, dependence of volunteers, lack of experience in grant writing among council members, and lack of information technology support and knowledge were also concerns. A number of interviewees recommended opportunities for sharing information across councils during the RFA timeline and/or after awards are determined. Another respondent recommended assigning a staff member from the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood as the contact person for application assistance.

Lack of clarity regarding the review and scoring processes were concerns for several respondents. One respondent reported that information was shared at a state conference that funding was equally split among councils and the RFA review and scoring had little impact on funding, negatively impacting council member investment in the RFA. Several respondents also recommended feedback regarding the applications or distribution of the scoring sheets.

State Supports to Community Early Childhood Councils

The most frequent response to questions regarding needed council supports underscored the desire for opportunities for CECC members to meet together, receive training, and share best practices. Both statewide and regional meetings were recommended as well as webinars and conference calls. Topics for training and technical assistance that were identified by interviewees include effective board development, by-laws development, team-building, non-profit establishment, English Language Learner supports, family engagement, family outreach, new chair training, leadership development, new All STARS system, budgeting, and data collection and measurement.

Interviewees were asked about the role of the annual state conference in supporting CECCs. Although there were a significant number of respondents that spoke in positive terms regarding the conference, its focus on training for teachers was reported as its strength. Most respondents noted that the conference no longer offers opportunities for CECCs to meet, receive training, and share ideas. Other concerns noted regarding the state conference included lack of notice resulting in budget amendments, cost, and insufficient space (sold out this year and people were turned away).

When asked about CECC participation in the School Readiness Summits, half of the councils were unaware of or not invited to participate in the Summits. Although several of those that did participate reported a positive impact and good collaboration, many raised concerns regarding duplication of efforts and recommended better coordination across school districts and CECCs. One respondent noted that problems were created in multi-county councils when school superintendents in some county school districts participated in the School Readiness Summits and superintendents in other county school districts did not. Recommendations were made to utilize the CECCs as the convener of the Summits.

Overall, most interviewees recommended improvements and supports that would enable greater collaboration across CECCs. Improvements to the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood website were recommended, including incorporating easy to use local directories, improved links, and more information on local activities. More frequent newsletters and webinars were also recommended.

When asked for input regarding potential changes or supports for local planning, many respondents recommended opportunities for sharing best practices and ideas across the state. A few respondents stated that a lack of communication and support from the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood had a negative impact on local planning. As an example, one respondent noted that there is no CECC directory or listserv to make contacting colleagues in other councils easy, and another reported that multiple inquiries were required before a response was received. Increased flexibility in membership based on local parameters was recommended.

Respondents were split in their perceptions of communications between the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood and CECCs. Approximately half of interviewees spoke positively regarding communications, and the other half raised concerns about lack of consistent communication. Chief among concerns was the lack of notification regarding staff changes and the lack of a directory identifying staff responsibilities to assist with call inquiries. Other concerns include lack of timeliness in responses and lack of clarity regarding focus of emails (e.g., information only, requires action, etc.). A few respondents recommended local CECC visits by state staff.

Perceptions regarding the Work of Councils

Interviewees, in large part, were very positive about the work of local councils. With a few exceptions, interviewees associated many benefits to their communities and the state from the council system. When asked about the

strengths of local councils, the most frequent response addressed the community collaboration and diverse partnerships that resulted from the work, with associated reduced duplication of services, maximization of financial resources, and increased service access for children and families. The second most frequent response to this question addressed the increased awareness of and focus on school readiness in their communities. Others noted the value of localized planning and decision-making, the ability to problem-solve and address specific local needs, reaching hard-to-reach families, and creation of a common vision.

Respondents, when asked about challenges associated with CECCs, most frequently reported difficulties in getting all the partners to the table. Noting the volunteer nature of council membership, with almost all members having full-time jobs, interviewees discussed the difficulty in completing activities. This appeared to be particularly problematic for smaller councils without sufficient funding to hire staff or a project coordinator. Two respondents discussed the negative impact on participation of having multiple local coalitions (e.g., Preschool Partnership, School Readiness Summit teams, CECC) with overlapping membership and responsibilities. Many respondents included the change in funding parameters that prohibited council support of child care training and mini-grants as an impediment to getting child care participation on the council. A few also noted the difficulty of getting all school districts to participate. The difficulty of outreach to the most at-risk, hard-to-find children and families was also a reported challenge. Other challenges that were raised included lack of cooperation across partners, lack of resources and leverage opportunities in rural counties, and lack of transportation.

Interviewees reported that the strongest motivation for partners to participate as members of CECCs was their commitment to young children, their families, and their communities. Respondents also noted that motivations were

driven by work responsibilities as council activities were aligned to the paid work roles of most of its members.

When questioned about the specific work of the councils, the activities that were recounted by the majority of respondents as evidenced-based and most effective were one-day family events where community partners gathered to share resources, provide activities for children, and distribute information on school readiness. Book distribution and early literacy activities, such as the Dolly Parton Library, were the next most frequently reported activity. Child and parent engagement opportunities were frequently noted with a range of intensity from one night to five weeks of training. Several interviewees discussed the distribution of resource bags or kits, often with a focus on school readiness. Many respondents indicated that child care trainings were the most effective activity, although they were no longer allowed. Three interviewees noted developmental screening opportunities.

When asked about how their CECCs inform the community about the value and importance of early childhood, most respondents listed multiple mechanisms. Distribution of materials and resources during community and partner events, through public service announcements and social media, at presentations before civic and business groups, and via partner organizations (e.g., health department, pediatricians, home visiting entities, parks, libraries, housing authorities, early care and education providers, etc.) were frequently noted. One interviewee talked about the power of branding in the council area to deliver consistent messaging through the wide distribution of branded materials.

Funding and Reporting Requirements

There were few recommendations regarding reporting requirements, with several interviewees noting that they were relatively easy. Recommendations that were made included release of the reporting templates earlier, consistency of

reports from year-to-year, clearer guidance on requirements, and follow-up feedback on annual reports. Most interviewees reported on the importance of the Early Childhood Profile in informing their local activities (e.g., choosing activities and resources for events and/or bags based on average scores in various developmental domains), their reports, and the return on investment for the state.

When asked about data collection and measurement, respondents most frequently noted the difficulty of collecting data locally given the volunteer structure of the councils. Most reported using counts of participation or number of resources distributed. A few discussed pre- and post-surveys at family engagement events. Only one council reported use of a valid and reliable observation-based tool. Several respondents recommended that data be collected at the state level or defined by the state. One interviewee suggested the creation of a state database specifically for councils to enter state-identified data points.

When asked about the funding of councils, the most frequent responses related to the importance of continuing to fund councils and to how funds are distributed. Interviewees from councils receiving under \$10,000 were more likely to raise the issue of low and insufficient funding amounts. These councils were more likely to have negative views of how funding disbursement and requirement decisions were made. Overall, many respondents noted that it is unclear how funding decisions are made, and greater clarity on the funding formula was recommended. The gaps in funding due to the timing of the RFA were concerns of several respondents as well as the prohibitions on spending for food, child care, and transportation. The majority of respondents that reported using the budget amendment process noted its ease of use, with the only recommendation being distribution of the requirements at the beginning of the fiscal year or placing the application on-line.

State-Local Partnerships – A Review of Councils in Other States

A number of states have utilized local councils or partnerships as important components of their early care and education systems. Local councils are often more effective than state-level entities in identifying and addressing specific local needs and coordinating services in their communities. They also are often more successful in building support for early childhood issues at the local level, leveraging additional resources.

The following information provides an overview of state-local partnerships in six states that may prompt some policy discussions and be helpful in analyzing Kentucky's system. Like Kentucky, four of the states are recipients of the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant: Colorado, Maryland, North Carolina, and Oregon. In terms of the amount of funding directed to local councils and the number of children birth to age 5, Maryland is most similar to Kentucky. Multiple sources were used for this information, including resources from the Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance Program and documents found on each of the states' early learning websites. A table summarizing this information is included as Appendix B.

Arizona

In 2006, Proposition 203 was passed, a citizen's initiative to fund quality early childhood development and health programs for children birth to age 5 through an 80-cent per pack increase on tobacco products. A statewide board, *First Things First*, was established along with regional partnership councils to share the responsibility of ensuring that funds are spent on strategies that will improve the education and health outcomes for Arizona's young children.

Governance Structure

The state board, *First Things First*, provides oversight and infrastructure support to 28 local/regional councils. The regional partnerships are made up of

11 volunteer members, representing parents, educators, business leaders, tribal representatives, health professionals, philanthropists and leaders of faith communities. Responsible for local planning and collaborative delivery of services, they determine which early childhood services will be funded in their communities. *Goals and Priorities*

First Things First, as a key partner in Arizona's early childhood system, focuses on evidence-based strategies designed to support school readiness. The state board is responsible for establishing priority areas. Their priority areas include:

- Increase access to high quality early care and education and children's readiness for school
- Support stable and nurturing families
- Increase access to health care
- Support a coordinated, integrated, and high quality early childhood system
- Ensure early childhood education and health professionals are well-prepared, highly skilled, and well compensated
- Increase public appreciation of children's early years

Local councils decide how to best utilize funds in their communities to support these goals and priorities.

Funding

Regional partnerships are funded with an additional tax on tobacco products; there is no state legislative appropriation. Some private funds are raised. *First Things First* administers statewide initiatives and awards regional and statewide grants through competitive Requests for Grant Applications. Funds are allotted to local councils based on the birth to age 5 population, which was 436,657 young children in 2016. The total council allocation for 2016 was \$106,932,236.

Activities

Regional partnership activities to support their state goals focus on three areas in Arizona:

- Program quality and access supports through Quality First to help regulated programs, trainings for Family, Friend and Neighbor care; and resources for Summer Transition to Kindergarten)
- Family Support through parenting kits, Birth to 5 Helpline, Family Resource Centers, parent classes, and home visitation
- Preventative Health supports through screenings and assistance with access to health insurance and care

Accountability

To ensure accountability at the local level, each regional partnership must provide information that shows they are providing the services to children required in their contracts with *First Things First*. They are also subject to annual performance and fiscal monitoring and comprehensive programmatic monitoring every 3 to 5 years. Every two years, an extensive study of local needs and resources is required to help inform state and local improvements and services. This data is utilized to monitor the impact of investments and services.

Ten School Readiness Indicators are used to guide and measure progress:

- % of children receiving at least 6 well-child visits in first 15 months of life
- % of children ages 2-4 with BMI in healthy weight range
- % of children age 5 with untreated tooth decay
- % of families that report they are confident and competent to support their children
- % of children kindergarten ready across developmental domains
- % of children enrolled in a 3 to 5 star rated ECE program
- % of children with special needs in an inclusive 3 to 5 star rated ECE program

- % of families spending no more than 10% of median regional family income on ECE
- % of children with undetected developmental delays at kindergarten entry
- % of children exiting preschool special education and entering regular education in kindergarten

Colorado

Colorado has a long history of strong local decision-making structures. Building on local child care pilots established in 1996, Early Childhood Councils were established in legislation in 2007.

Governance Structure

Each Early Childhood Council (ECC) in Colorado decides on its own governance structure and must have a fiscal sponsor to receive funding. A non-profit membership organization, ECC Leadership Alliance, represents and supports the 31 local councils.

Goals and Priorities

The Colorado Office of Early Childhood establishes statewide early childhood goals, which are:

- Access to high quality early care and education and children's readiness for school
- Stable and nurturing families
- Access to health care
- Early childhood social, emotional, and mental health promotion

Early Childhood Council priority areas are aligned to these goals, and their system framework currently incorporates access, quality, and equity outcomes and benchmarks. Current benchmarks focus on:

- Promoting transitions of the children in their communities – from infants to toddler classrooms, toddler to Pre-K classrooms, and transition to kindergarten
- Promoting family engagement in QRIS
- Improving the quality rating of all licensed early learning programs

Funding

A combination of Child Care and Development Block Grant funds, other state/federal grants (e.g., RTT-ELC, Infant and Toddler Quality and Availability Program, and the Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visitation Program), and local and private funds are used to fund local councils. Councils receive funding on a 3-year grant cycle. The total allocation to local early childhood councils in 2016-17 was \$7,684,733. In 2016 in Colorado, there were 337,973 children birth to age 5.

Activities

Advancing programs, resources, and support around:

- Early learning – professional development, school readiness, support for special needs, and environmental support activities
- Family support and parent education – information, resources, home-visiting, leadership, self-sufficiency activities
- Social, emotional, and mental health – training, screening, mental health consultation, and support services
- Health – access to prenatal and health services, insurance referral, immunizations, training, and other support services

Accountability

Early Childhood Councils receive an annual compliance review by the State Department based on their evaluation report. The report addresses

program benchmarks for the identified state priority areas and incorporates metrics based on their local strategic plan.

Iowa

An alliance of state agencies, organizations, and community partners formed Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) in 2001.

Governance Structure

A State Board provides oversight and infrastructure support to 39 local councils representing all 99 counties in Iowa for local planning and collaborative delivery of services.

Goals and Priorities

- Access to high quality early care and education
- Children ready for school
- Stable and nurturing families
- Access to health care
- Safe and supportive communities

Funding

Local councils are funded through State General Funds, and councils received approximately \$22,000,000 statewide in FY 2016. The birth to age 5 population in Iowa in 2016 was 200,620.

Activities

Local activities and strategies align to the 5 priority areas and include:

- General health services
- Dental services
- Prenatal services
- Screening and referral

- ECE tuition assistance and scholarships
- ECE technical assistance
- ECE child transportation services
- Literacy supports
- ECE nurse consultants
- WAGE\$ supports
- Quality improvement supports
- Professional development training, mentoring, & coaching
- Crisis care services
- Family support services
- Resource libraries
- Coordinated intake
- Child seat safety checks
- Public awareness activities

Accountability

All ECI areas collect performance and fiscal data on services provided and file annual reports. Performance is evaluated via a Levels of Excellence Rating System process. Annual report data is also compiled and shared as the State ECI Report.

Maryland

Early Childhood Councils grew out of RTT-ELC strategic planning and were established in legislation in 2014.

Governance Structure

A State Board provides oversight and infrastructure support to local councils for local planning and collaborative delivery of services.

Goals and Priorities

- To establish annual benchmarks of school readiness skills of children entering kindergarten
- To conduct a periodic needs assessment of the quality and availability of ECE services
- To create an action plan for increasing participation of children in existing programs including outreach to special and underrepresented populations
- To coordinate locally the RTT-ELC goals and objectives, and other initiatives
- To report progress and challenges to the State Advisory Council

Funding

Early Childhood Councils receive \$1.1 million from Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge funds. A funding formula that took into account child (ages birth to 5), children with disabilities, and English-Language Learner populations was used to distribute funds across the 24 councils. The birth to age 5 population in Maryland in 2016 was 367,003.

Activities

Local activities vary but include:

- Professional development supports
- Family engagement supports
- Reach Out and Read partnerships with health care providers
- Technical assistance and support to ECE providers participating in EXCELS, the Maryland QRIS
- Family outreach activities
- Community engagement activities

Accountability

Councils complete quarterly progress and annual evaluation reports on their activities using results-based accountability metrics.

North Carolina

The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. was created to oversee local Smart Start partnerships in state statute in 1993, with the most recent changes to the statute occurring in 2016.

Governance Structure

The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. oversees a network of 75 non-profit organizations serving all 100 counties within North Carolina with a focus on use of data-driven results (outlined in performance standards).

Goals and Priorities

- Increase quality of child care
- Strengthen families
- Advance child health and development
- Improve early literacy

Funding

State funding is leveraged with Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, local, and private funds along with local in-kind donations. \$142.1 million was expended in local partnership funds in 2015-16. The population of children birth to age 5 in 2016 was 608,802.

Activities

- Provision of training and technical assistance to support increased quality of child care

- Expansion of early literacy activities
- Provision of health, nutrition, and safety supports
- Provision of family education and resources through child care programs to increase parents' knowledge of child development
- Coordination of development screenings
- Facilitation of access to child care subsidies and PreK

Accountability

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services oversees the performance standards for Smart Start and conducts annual contract monitoring. NCPC also monitors local councils for adherence to performance standards and publishes an annual report. Fiscal independent audits are required no less than every 2 years, and third-party system evaluations are conducted periodically.

Some of the accountability findings include:

- Increase in % of children in 4 & 5 star programs (the average star rating for children enrolled in regulated child care improved from 2.76 in 2001 to 4.31 in 2016)
- Parents participating in Reach Out and Read (ROR) were 92% more likely than new participants to engage in reading activities with their children
- Increase in the number of children who received appropriate developmental screenings (NC has highest rate of developmental screenings in the nation)
- Smart Start was found to reduce special education placements in grades 3, 4, & 5 by nearly 10% and reduce a child's chance of retention in 5th grade by 13%

Oregon

Sixteen regional/community-based Early Learning Hubs, serving 36 counties, were created in legislation in 2013.

Governance Structure

Oregon Department of Education provides funding and support to local councils for local planning and collaborative delivery of services, and a separate nonprofit organization provides primary support for the councils.

Goals and Priorities

- Create aligned, coordinated, and family-centered early learning system
- Ensure school readiness
- Ensure healthy, stable and attached families

Funding

Early Learning Hubs are funded through State General Funds. The most recent allocation was \$4.7 million allocated over a two-year period. There were 237,420 children birth to age 5 in Oregon in 2016.

Activities

Local activities focus on:

- Coordination of early learning services
- Alignment and integration of efforts across sectors (i.e., ECE, K-12, health, human services, and business community)
- Improved results for at-risk children
- Leverage of additional private and public funds, including in-kind support

Accountability

The Department of Education Early Learning Division oversees Early Learning Hubs and defines performance metrics. Monitoring protocols were developed and visits began the spring of 2017.

Early Learning Hubs are required to develop a strategic plan and report on 8 metrics:

- Increase # of children attending high quality early learning programs participating in QRIS
- Improve kindergarten readiness rates
- Increase # of children who receive developmental screening by age 3
- Increase # of children with primary health care home
- Increase # of at-risk children served across the system
- Decrease the cost of service (decreasing administrative overhead)
- Decrease the age of onset of services

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Request for Application Processes

Although both council members and reviewers were, on average, positive regarding the RFA process, there appear to be a number of areas for improvement. Greater transparency regarding the review and scoring process as well as the funding formula is recommended in order to engender greater trust and partnership between state and local leaders. Although CECC concerns with the timeline were likely impacted by this year's RFA delay due to this evaluation, it remains true that consistency in the timeline and process for applying would support better local planning and implementation of local activities. Release of the RFA six to eight weeks prior to the due date would ensure adequate time to bring partners together for planning and writing the application.

Council Strengths and Challenges

For those councils with strong member participation and collaboration, there were reports of significant leveraging of resources to maximize the funding provided by the State. Increased local awareness of the importance of school readiness and the early years and support for early childhood issues were important outcomes reported by council leaders. Families with young children were provided with a number of resources, training opportunities, materials, and activities. This evaluation confirms that local partnerships can be effective in identifying and meeting local needs and building local commitment.

As noted in the findings, the challenge for many CECCs is engaging all the local partners and having a strong collaborative partnership to leverage funding and spread the work across an integrated system of local services. In a number of areas, council planning, decision-making, and work falls on a few shoulders, limiting the impact in terms of services provided, public awareness,

data collection, and outcomes. The change in CECC funding parameters, away from supporting early care and education providers and toward more outreach and family engagement activities, identifying and supporting families with children that are not in care, likely impacted the feedback received during this evaluation. Many councils appear to be struggling with the change in direction.

Interestingly, there were very few significant differences among council responses between rural/urban councils or single-/multi-county councils. It appears that this lack of differences in responses is likely linked to funding levels, the only variable that revealed significant differences. There are a number of urban councils that receive funding levels similar to rural areas, as well as single-county councils that receive amounts similar to multi-county councils when the number of counties served is considered. The variability in responses occurred between those councils receiving the lowest funding (under \$10,000) and those receiving more. With less funding, council responses were more likely to be negative and the council challenges greater.

Council Impact

CECCs are an important part of Kentucky's school readiness goal, and their activities focus primarily on spreading the school readiness message in their communities. Almost all of those interviewed identified commitment to children as the major council member motivator, and the success of their work was often noted in terms of how well they worked together with their local partners to support young children and their families. Despite this focus of their activities, there was a lack of clarity among council respondents regarding the priorities of council work, and use of evidence-based practices was infrequently reported. Often council members framed their impact in terms of how many families they reached or how many children participated in activities, rather than changes in knowledge, skill, or behavior.

Data collection and measurement is difficult for the majority of councils. Data collection plans are often limited to counts of resources distributed or number of participants, understandable given the type of activities that are implemented, their local approved plans, and their funding levels. Frequently dependent on volunteer board members or staff of various partnering organizations with other responsibilities, little appears to be collected and data that are collected appear to lack reliability and validity. There also seemed to be lost opportunities for obtaining data reflective of good outcomes. For example, developmental screening activities were reported by a few of the interviewees but collection of findings and referrals were not tracked. There were exceptions where pre- and post- evaluations of satisfaction, and most promising, behaviors and skills were conducted. These practices were associated with councils that employed council or project coordinators.

Council Supports

Most CECC members regard the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood as a strong and supportive leader. Based on the findings of this evaluation, however, CECCs are often operating in separate silos. There is little communication across councils, and council members are not benefiting from hearing about best practices among colleagues. Although there appear to have been some resources and opportunities in the past, according to survey responses, there are currently no state or regional meetings specifically planned to bring together council leaders or members, no training for new chairs, no listserv for council chairs and/or members to share information, few webinars and training opportunities for council members, and technical assistance appears to be limited. The perceived absence of these supports results in a lack of cohesive direction for council work.

Alignment of Council Activities with Kentucky School Readiness Goal

Many of the respondents reported the use of the Early Childhood Profile, and specifically the Kindergarten Readiness Rates and Brigance scores, in their planning of local activities. School readiness brochures, flyers, parent guides, and supports were included in the majority of council activities. When questioned about the value of local councils, many spoke to the number of families that were provided with resources to support their child's school readiness because of council efforts. There appears to be a strong alignment of council priorities to Kentucky's School Readiness Goal.

Demonstration of Return on Investment

Return on investment analysis compares the economic value of the benefits of programs and policies with their associated costs. Calculations require measuring total costs of the program, determining and measuring the outcomes of the program, valuing the outcomes, and comparing the benefits and costs. Total cost must include the value of any in-kind donations, such as rent-free office space or volunteers' time, and a determination of any costs that would be incurred in the absence of the program. Valuing outcomes requires making valid comparisons of a wide range of impacts.³

The most likely outcome of council work is an impact on kindergarten readiness rates, and the Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council noted the paramount importance of local CECCs in supporting school readiness in their last report.⁴ Since the establishment of a statewide Kindergarten Readiness Rate in Kentucky, there has been a significant increase in readiness rates statewide, from a 49% readiness rate in 2013-14 to a 51% readiness rate in 2016-17 ($p < .05$). However, council efforts are one piece of a much larger system effort in support

³ Karoly, L. A. (2010). *Toward standardization of benefit-cost analyses in early childhood interventions*. Arlington, VA: RAND.

⁴ Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood. (2015). *Early childhood council bi-annual report: Seeding Kentucky's future*. Frankfort, KY: author.

of school readiness. Furthermore, data collected from local councils tends to provide counts or levels of satisfaction, rather than outcomes that reflect changes in behavior or skill, making it difficult to determine impact. There is also a lack of data collected on in-kind donations, which may be substantial at the local level.

In conclusion, although a formal return on investment calculation specific to council work is not possible as part of this analysis, it appears from this evaluation that CECCs are one contributing factor in Kentucky's significant increase in kindergarten readiness rates.

Recommendations

Organization of Councils

Many of the Community Early Childhood Councils in Kentucky receive relatively small pots of funding. Spreading the current statewide CECC budget across so many entities dilutes the potential impact of local planning and service provision, and it prohibits many CECCs from hiring project coordinators to assist with reporting and data collection. A reduction in the number of CECCs is recommended.

This will not be a popular proposal in many areas, as local leaders may fear loss of the ability to address specific county needs. To support as positive of a transition as possible, the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood should provide the 'what' and the CECCs should provide the 'how'. The decision-making regarding which councils merge should be led by local councils but should be guided by state parameters and support. These state parameters might include designating a minimum birth to five population that must be served by a council, counties included in the mergers must be contiguous, and council membership requirements that ensure representation across all counties included in a multi-county council.

Councils will need support to undertake mergers. Planning guides, meeting facilitation technical assistance, and strategic planning resources are

recommended. Utilizing successful multi-county councils as mentors may be helpful.

Funding

One of the potential benefits of merging councils is that state CECC funding can be divided between fewer entities resulting in larger pots of money. Although the funds have to be spread across larger areas, there are efficiencies of operation that will be realized as well as the potential for less duplication of efforts and improved staffing.

It is also recommended that CECCs are strongly encouraged and supported to raise local and private funds to supplement their state funding. One recommended approach is to award additional RFA points for securing additional funding and/or to add additional funding to performance criteria and standards. Fiscal reporting and monitoring should incorporate local and private funding. Training and technical assistance on securing additional funds should be provided.

Priorities, Outcomes, and Benchmarks

The Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council has reported that CECCs are a key strategy in increasing collaboration and improving local implementation of their system work plan.⁵ The Kentucky Early Childhood Advisory Council went on to note that, at their best, local councils are designed to bring together diverse members of the community and mobilize them to work collaboratively as change agents to achieve community level improvements in school readiness. There is good evidence that a number of councils are operating 'at their best' and are achieving community level improvements that impact readiness rates. The lack of a cohesive and consistent understanding among

⁵ Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood. (2015). *Early childhood council bi-annual report: Seeding Kentucky's future*. Frankfort, KY: author.

CECC leaders regarding their role in Kentucky's early childhood plan suggests the need for more consistent language and alignment.

Kentucky's system work, with its focus on high quality learning environments, supportive families, and access to data to support school readiness, provides a strong framework for alignment of local CECC plans. While maintaining the overall goal of school readiness, it may be helpful to more explicitly tie Council priorities, outcomes, and benchmarks to the Kentucky All STARS goals and the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge work in CECC communications. Although a framework for CECC work was included in the RFA, it is important for everyone to understand how CECCs fit with the roles of other system entities in Kentucky's early childhood work in order to build commitment and vision and create feelings of being "part of the team".

For greater impact, it is recommended that the Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood identify evidence-based practices that CECCs should support. One focus area might be offering an introductory training to early care and education providers regarding *Kentucky All STARS*, helping promote greater participation across early care and education programs. A second recommended focus area is facilitating evidence-based family engagement and training opportunities, such as Strengthening Families, HANDS, or Born Learning Academies. Expanding access to developmental screening and referral is another area that has potential for great impact on school readiness. For alignment with the 'access to data' goal, local plans can continue to address strategies to share the Early Childhood Profiles and raise awareness of school readiness among all community members. Performance metrics could be identified for each of these areas.

Performance standards and benchmarks would be helpful to making local planning more strategic and for monitoring of progress. Benchmarks could be statewide, with input from CECCs, or could be developed by the local councils with guidance, training, and technical assistance.

Accountability

When funding levels are low, accountability metrics are at risk of being overly burdensome and can take away from use of funds for the intended work. Those making investment decisions, however, are wise to establish accountability measures to assure funds are put to intended use, and it is unlikely that additional funding will be directed to a system component without strong evidence of a wise investment. CECCs have the potential to be a primary component of Kentucky's early childhood system and to justify additional funding. Realizing this potential will require a stronger accountability system.

Expectations for accountability should be developed in concert with council merger plans. Annual performance and fiscal desk monitoring are recommended, with on-site monitoring staggered across councils every two to three years. Reporting requirements should be aligned with performance standards and best fiscal practices. A statewide data dashboard for CECC benchmark reporting is recommended.

Council Supports

In addition to the training, technical assistance, and resource supports required for council mergers, efforts should focus on creating a network of CECCs. Currently, many council leaders feel isolated, and opportunities to not 'reinvent the wheel' are lost because council members are not talking to each other and sharing best practices. Instituting biannual or quarterly meetings or conference calls of council chairs is recommended. In addition, a listserv or special website for sharing information and resources across councils, more frequent training webinars, regular newsletter highlights of work in various council areas, and designated Kentucky Governor's Office of Early Childhood staff technical assistance contacts are suggested.

Change Implementation Options

Implementation of the recommendations in this report based on the evaluation of Kentucky's CECCs require careful creation of new implementation design planning and development of support structures. There are fiscal, programmatic, and policy considerations. Two options are offered. Each option requires an integrated stage-based framework for implementation to guide the work.

Transition Option 1

As Kentucky remains eligible for Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge funding, Option 1 promotes immediate change implementation in order to take advantage of funding for infrastructure development that may not be available once the federal funding is over. This option requires state and local work simultaneously. Steps in this option include:

1. Identifying the metrics and requirements for council mergers based on funding parameters, contiguous geography, and size impacts (limitations on the number of total council members supporting more efficient council meetings and operations must be balanced with representation across all included counties)
2. Provision of local planning grants to support merger decisions. This step is likely to require many councils to suspend current activities and focus on merger planning for the remainder of the 2017-18 fiscal year. Those councils that meet the new threshold size are provided with a second year of current funding to continue 2016-17 activities
3. Development and distribution of merger supports, such as resource manuals, guidelines, training, and technical assistance

4. Framework and messaging refinement to clarify CECC mission and priorities aligned with Kentucky All STARS and Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge priorities
5. Development of performance standards and benchmarks with input from CECCs or development of training and technical assistance to support CECC use of local performance metrics tied to the state framework and priorities
6. Development of state infrastructure for improved CECC support, including website and listserv, data dashboard, trainings, and technical assistance
7. Development of an accountability plan for fiscal and performance reporting and monitoring
8. Release of new RFA by mid-March with a submission deadline in early May, and funding decisions announced by June 1 with a July 1 release of funding

Transition Option 2

This option provides for a longer planning and development timeline and provides more time for CECCs to develop merger partnerships and plans.

1. Utilize fiscal year 2017-18 for state-level planning and development, including all the items outlined in Option 1 with the exception of #2, local planning grants to prepare for mergers

2. CECC RFA proceeds for fiscal year 2017-18 with additional training and technical assistance provided to support improved data collection and measurement

3. Development of a transition plan for mergers over the next 1 to 2 years