

## A FOCUS ON INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN STATE ADVISORY COUNCILS

**D**uring the first years of their child's life, parents play the most active and influential role in their baby's healthy development, and yet that can be difficult without support from others.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in these difficult economic times, a substantial number of young children live in families facing financial and social stresses that place them at risk developmentally. Policymakers at both the federal and state levels are recognizing these challenges and the need to create a comprehensive system of services for young children. However, while the concept of providing pre-K is readily grasped, the needs of infants, toddlers and their families are not as widely understood. Just as a baby's needs and abilities are far more complex than is readily apparent, a comprehensive approach to ensuring their optimal development is equally multifaceted and crosses several domains—health, mental health, education, and social services.

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Moreover, a system for very young children must provide support for parents as they take on the challenging task of raising children. States struggle to promote coordination among the multiple services and supports for young children and their families, as well as to improve their quality and make them available to all who could benefit.

Therefore, as part of the Head Start reauthorization bill passed into law in 2007, federal lawmakers required the creation of State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care. This paper provides an overview of states' current coordinating and governance structures and lessons learned from analyses done by leading organizations. It describes the new requirements for State Advisory Councils and related decisions to be made by states. The paper offers guidance to states on including a focus on infants and toddlers as they make decisions about the formation of State Advisory Councils and the activities of those Councils. The State Advisory Councils in four states—Connecticut, New Mexico, Ohio, and Virginia—are profiled as examples of varying approaches taken to meet the requirements in the Head Start reauthorization law.

## Current Early Childhood Coordinating and Governance Structures

Over the years, states have established various planning and governance structures, including task forces, commissions, councils, cabinets, public-private partnerships, and new state agencies or departments. The specific scope, purposes, and functions differ from state to state and among different structures in the same state. Some are focused on a particular population or type of program. Some manage a new initiative or funding stream. Others aim to improve coordination and integration of a wide variety of services and supports.

Many states have established early childhood advisory councils to promote cohesive services for young children. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices surveyed states in the fall of 2007 regarding the presence and nature of state early childhood advisory councils. Of the 36 states that responded, 31 reported having an early childhood advisory council; 6 of the 31 had multiple coordinating entities. Over two-thirds (68%) were established after 2000. The primary focus of most councils is coordination, and their most prevalent activities are related to professional development, early learning outcomes and standards, and assessment of the availability of high-quality birth to 5 services.<sup>2</sup>

**The 2007 Head Start reauthorization directs the Governor of each state to designate or establish a State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care for children from birth to school entry.**



## Lessons Learned from Analyses by Leading Organizations

There is no “right” approach or structure to establishing an early childhood coordinating and governance entity, but leading organizations in the field offer some guidance for states.

### Attributes

The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network and the Build Initiative recommended that a governance structure have five attributes:

1. **Representative**—involving those whose perspectives, talents, and positions are needed to make effective decisions
2. **Legitimate**—regarded as a fair and appropriate locus for decision-making by those affected by the decisions made
3. **Enduring**—sustainable across changes in membership and in state or local political leadership
4. **Effective and flexible**—organized and structured for continuous learning and quality improvement
5. **Authoritative**—capable of holding the system accountable<sup>3</sup>

### Critical Elements, Change Strategies, and Structural Characteristics

The Forum for Youth Investment’s Ready by 21™ Change Model identified two critical elements for children’s cabinets and councils—**stakeholder engagement** and **shared accountability**—and four integrated change strategies:

1. **Engage youth and their families.**
2. **Increase demand.**
3. **Align policies and resources.**
4. **Improve services.**

The Forum asserted that a council’s effectiveness is also influenced by its structural characteristics: **scope and mission, organizational home, authority, staffing and resources, composition and scale,** and **parallel local structures.**<sup>4</sup>

### Lessons on Collaborative Work

In *State Advisory Councils: Creating Systems of Early Education and Care*, Pre-K Now profiled early childhood advisory councils in four states (Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Wisconsin) and described eight lessons from their collaborative work:

1. **Begin with a broad vision.**
2. **Cultivate champions.**
3. **Seek broad support and state legislation.**
4. **Build on successes; don’t reinvent the wheel.**
5. **Nurture strong relationships between individuals.**
6. **Balance collaborative leadership with results.**
7. **Stimulate and respond to local innovation and lessons.**
8. **Build broad public awareness and support.**<sup>5</sup>

An overarching or umbrella structure, which has the authority and leadership needed to ensure a coordinated approach across organizational entities, can effectively plan, promote, and implement a comprehensive agenda for young children. Recent federal requirements offer an opportunity to establish a new structure or enhance an existing one to assure collaboration among various early childhood programs.



## State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care

**T**he Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (Head Start reauthorization) directs the Governor of each state to designate or establish a State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care for children from birth to school entry. Governors may designate an existing entity to serve as the State Advisory Council, and representatives are to be appointed at the Governor's discretion. To the maximum extent possible, membership must include the State Head Start Collaboration director and representatives from the state child care agency; the state educational agency; local educational agencies; institutions of higher education; 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 agency responsible for programs under section 619 or Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; the state agency responsible for health or mental health care; and other entities determined to be relevant by the Governor.

Responsibilities of the State Advisory Council include the following:

- **Conducting a periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry**
- **Identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services**
- **Developing recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in existing child care and early childhood education programs**
- **Developing recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system for public early childhood education and development programs**
- **Developing recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators**
  - **Assessing the capacity and effectiveness of 2- and 4-year public and private institutions of higher education to support the development of early childhood educators**
  - **Making recommendations for improvements in early learning standards and undertaking efforts to develop high-quality comprehensive early learning standards**

A baby's needs and abilities are complex, and therefore a comprehensive approach to ensuring their optimal development must be equally multifaceted and cross several domains – health, mental health, education and social services.

Councils are required to hold public hearings that offer an opportunity for public comment and to submit a statewide strategic report. The State Advisory Council must meet periodically to review implementation of the report's recommendations.



The 2007 Head Start reauthorization also included a provision for one-time, three-year start-up grants to be awarded to states on a competitive basis. Grants would be \$500,000 or more and would require a 70% state match. Funds could be used to develop or enhance high-quality systems of early childhood education and care by:

- **Encouraging families and caregivers to support their children's development and early education**
- **Supporting professional development, recruitment, and retention of early childhood educators**
- **Enhancing existing early childhood education and development programs and services**
- **Carrying out other activities consistent with the state's plan**

Eligible states would submit an application that would include the statewide strategic report.<sup>6</sup>

Grants will be available only in years when the Congressional appropriation for Head Start is sufficient to cover a variety of essential program activities. No funding for State Advisory Council grants was made available in FY 08. Regulations providing greater detail about State Advisory Councils and other requirements in the 2007 Head Start reauthorization have not yet been released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as of December 2008.





## Establishing State Advisory Councils: Implications for Infants and Toddlers

### RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

- **Take a broad view in defining the existing system.**
- **Assure that the Council's organizational home and staff have knowledge of infant-toddler issues.**
- **Appoint some Council members with specific infant-toddler expertise.**
- **Promote the inclusion of infant-toddler representation on local coordinating and planning bodies.**

### State Decisions in Establishing Councils

When Head Start was reauthorized in 2007, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act required the governor of each state to designate or establish a State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care for children from birth to school entry. While the legislation includes a number of requirements for State Advisory Councils (see pages 4-5), each state has the latitude to make decisions about the actual implementation of its Council. Many of the decisions that states must make relate to structural characteristics, as identified by the Forum for Youth Investment.

**Scope and mission:** Although federal law directs Councils to cover birth to school entry, states may choose a broader age range. They may include prenatal, at one end of the age continuum, and/or children through 8 years or a particular grade, at the other end. Decisions about scope and mission also relate to the breadth of the early childhood system to be addressed by the State Advisory Council. The Early Childhood System Builders' Workgroup, a group of national organizations providing technical assistance to state leaders on building early childhood systems, has conceptualized a comprehensive system as including health, mental health, and nutrition; family support; early learning; and special needs/early intervention. States should clarify the relationship of the State Advisory Council to other existing coordinating bodies such as Part C early intervention interagency coordinating councils, advisory committees to the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems planning or the Head Start State Collaboration Project, or P-16/20 councils. The scope and mission must be clearly articulated and understood.

**Organizational home:** States will need to decide where the State Advisory Council will be housed. If an existing entity is designated, its organizational home may have already been determined. Councils may be housed in the Governor's Office, another state agency, or a freestanding organization outside government. If a council is associated too directly with a single state agency, its neutrality may be compromised. Other factors to consider in choosing an organizational home are its ability to offer credibility, legitimacy, leadership, and capacity.<sup>7</sup>

**Authority:** The State Advisory Council's authority relates to two aspects: the creation of the body and its power to influence decisions. Although the Governor must designate the Council, he/she may do so through legislation or executive order. Establishing the Council in statute creates investment by the legislature and can increase the Council's permanence, while an executive order may give the Council more flexibility.<sup>8</sup> Optimally, the State Advisory Council will be given the authority to make planning and implementation decisions, influence policy, and direct resources.<sup>9</sup>

## STATE PROFILE: CONNECTICUT

# Early Childhood Education Cabinet



With Governor M. Jodi Rell as champion, Connecticut's legislature passed a bill in 2005 creating the Early Childhood Education Cabinet. The goals of the Cabinet are to ensure that babies born in 2006–07 and beyond:

- Reach age-appropriate milestones each year, birth to 5
- Enter kindergarten healthy and ready for school success
- Achieve the state's expected academic goal for reading performance in the fourth grade

The Cabinet began working in September 2005 to develop a multi-year early childhood investment framework for children from birth to age 9.

Members of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet include the heads of major state agencies, legislators, and representatives from the Connecticut Commission on Children, the School Readiness Council, and the Head Start Association. The Cabinet is co-chaired by the Governor's Senior Policy Advisor for Children and Youth and the Commissioner of Education. An Office of the Cabinet is staffed by three persons, and the Department of Education serves as the fiduciary agent. The work of the Cabinet is funded through state appropriations as well as co-investors from the philanthropic sector.

In February 2006, Governor Rell issued an executive order to create the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council, a 31-member panel of public and private leaders staffed by the Connecticut Economic Resource Center. The Council was tasked with creating a multi-year early childhood investment plan based on the priorities of the Cabinet. In addition, the Council was charged with advising the Cabinet on research findings, policy solutions, and strategic financing opportunities related to early childhood.

In July 2006, the Cabinet adopted Ready by Five, Fine by Nine: Connecticut's Early Childhood Investment Framework, which prioritized 50 action items related to the goals into 10 top priorities. The Research and Policy Council then developed a five-year cost-modeling plan, the Connecticut Early Childhood Investment Plan: Part I, adopted in November 2006.

The Cabinet's accomplishments include:

- Establishing minimum and a range of higher quality standards for early childhood programs receiving state funds
- Completing an early childhood workforce development plan
- Developing an accountability plan anchored in Results Based Accountability
- Designing an early childhood information system that includes child, teacher, and program data
- Making recommendations on data interoperability
- Partnering with foundations to support statewide parent leadership training and the development of early childhood strategic plans in 24 communities

Much of the Cabinet's work has been done through workgroups, one of which focused on the development of a birth to 3 systems framework. Its report, *First Words, First Steps: Connecticut's Infant-Toddler Systems Framework*, contains policy recommendations in the areas of maternal health, family support, physical and mental health, early care and education, early literacy, and systems innovation. The framework was reviewed at local forums, introduced during the Governor's Summit on Early Childhood, and approved by the Cabinet in September 2008. Some of the recommendations are already being implemented, such as the development of early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers that are aligned with standards for older children.

This work will continue through the newly established Standing Committee for Birth to 9 Services Integration, which will also function as the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care under the Head Start Act of 2007. This committee has been charged by the Cabinet with building systemic relationships across areas of service and support. The committee will examine the systems implications of various Cabinet policy reports, present information on best practices in systems development at the community level, and identify policy issues related to developing an early childhood system that require Cabinet or agency attention.

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**Staffing and resources:** Federal statute requires that the Governor designate an individual to coordinate the activities of the State Advisory Council. Having sufficient staff, who have an understanding of both early childhood and the collaborative process, is critical to moving the Council's work forward. Staff may be designated from a state agency or other organization as an in-kind contribution but must be given adequate time and authority to manage the work. Resources to support the staffing and other costs may come from state funds or in-kind contributions (potentially from multiple state agencies), private foundations and donations, and/or federal funds such as the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant, Head Start State Collaboration Project, Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or the quality portion of the Child Care and Development Fund.

**Composition and scale:** Federal law specifies particular state agencies and other programs that must be represented on the State Advisory Council. The only position specifically named is the **state director of Head Start Collaboration**, but representatives of state agencies responsible for the following programs must also be included:

- Child care
- Education
- Programs under section 619 (3 to 5 years) or Part C (0 to 3 years) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Health or mental health

The Governor must also appoint representatives of:

- Local educational agencies
- Institutions of higher education
- Local providers of early childhood education and development services
- Head Start, including migrant and seasonal Head Start and Indian Head Start programs



State advisory councils should appoint some Council members with specific infant-toddler expertise.



States may add other members determined by the Governor to be relevant to the Council's work.<sup>10</sup>

Decisions about additional members should consider an appropriate mix of public and private stakeholders, expertise to cover all areas of the Council's mission and tasks, geographic and cultural diversity, and liaisons with other related efforts. In his "Template for Creating State Advisory Councils on Early Education and Care," Regenstein suggests including representatives from different levels of the policy process:

- **Powerful elected and appointed officials (legislators, state school superintendents or board members)**
- **Political translators (gubernatorial and legislative staff, lobbyists)**
- **Policy translators (state early childhood staff, policy analysts at advocacy and membership organizations)**
- **Program personnel and line staff (direct service providers)<sup>11</sup>**

Size of the Council is another consideration. Councils must balance the need for inclusivity with the desire to manage the work without becoming too unwieldy. One way to involve others without creating an overly large Council is to develop committees, workgroups, or advisory councils that include individuals who are not members of the Council itself.

**Parallel local structures:** State Advisory Councils can help ensure that collaboration occurs at the community level, where most services are ultimately delivered. At a minimum, Councils need to be aware of and seek input from local coordinating and planning bodies. They may choose to intentionally support the development of such structures through resources and technical assistance. Strong partnerships between the Council and local bodies can give communities a voice in state-level decision-making and serve as laboratories for testing new state-local approaches to service planning and delivery.<sup>12</sup>



Unless the needs of infants and toddlers receive specific attention, they are often left out of more general discussions.



## Focusing on Infants and Toddlers in Establishing Councils

Many of the considerations in establishing State Advisory Councils pertain to the broad system covering all children from birth to school entry. However, unless the needs of infants and toddlers receive specific attention, they are often left out of more general discussions. The following recommendations assist states in focusing on very young children as they create or designate councils.

**Take a broad view in defining the existing system.** Just as a baby's growth encompasses social and emotional as well as physical and cognitive development, the programs and services to meet their needs include health, mental health, and family support in addition to early care and education. In considering the Council's scope, states should define the system broadly.

**Assure that the Council's organizational home and staff have knowledge of infant-toddler issues.**

While Councils' auspices will vary between states, it is critical that the agency or organization sponsoring the Council have some expertise related to very young children. Likewise, staff should be knowledgeable about the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families.

**Appoint some Council members with specific infant-toddler expertise.** The Council should include stakeholders involved in the infant-toddler field from both public and private sectors. They might include:

- Practitioners working directly with babies and their families through child care centers, family child care, and family, friend and neighbor care; Early Head Start; home visiting; Part C early intervention; or other programs
- Clinicians whose practices specialize in infants and toddlers, such as pediatricians or infant mental health specialists
- Researchers and academicians studying or teaching infant-toddler development
- Families with children under 3 years

Any committees or subgroups established by the Council should also include infant-toddler representatives.

**Promote the inclusion of infant-toddler representation on local coordinating and planning bodies.**

Similarly to state-level Councils, local collaborative groups should involve programs and individuals with infant-toddler expertise. If the State Advisory Council provides resources to parallel local structures, this can be required. If not, the Council can still serve as a model for involving infant-toddler representatives and considering issues related to our youngest children.

## STATE PROFILE: **NEW MEXICO**

# The Child Development Board



As a result of a task force recommendation, in 1989 the New Mexico legislature enacted a statute creating the Office of Child Development within the State Department of Education along with a Child Development Board to provide direction and oversight for its activities. The office and board were given the authority to identify the personnel requirements for individuals working with children birth through age 8 as well as to establish program standards and manage state-funded child development programs for children birth to 5. When the Children, Youth and Families Department was established in 1992, both the office and the board were transferred to that agency. In 2008, the Department was restructured to create an Early Childhood Services Division.

The Child Development Board consists of seven members from the private sector appointed by the Governor. Its work is supported by state general funds and staffed by employees of the Early Childhood Services Division, which includes state-funded pre-K and other early childhood development programs, child care quality initiatives, Head Start State Collaboration, home visiting, professional development certification, and the quality rating and improvement system. The Board has established two standing committees: the Early Childhood Higher Education Task Force and the Early Learning Committee. Ad hoc groups are created as needed.

The Child Development Board has served as a policy advisory body on early learning for almost 20 years. Its accomplishments include:

- A fully articulated competency-based career lattice with multiple pathways and levels of licensure and certification for all early childhood personnel working with children birth through third grade
- A quality improvement and rating system with corresponding differentiated subsidy rates applied to all licensed child care programs
- A state-funded child development program for children birth through 3 complemented by a mixed-delivery pre-K program for 4-year-olds

The board is developing an early learning plan for children birth through third grade to address the alignment of early childhood programs and serve as a framework for the establishment of a “system of systems.”

New Mexico also has a Children’s Cabinet formed through an executive order of Governor Bill Richardson in February 2003 and then established in statute in 2005. It is comprised of agency heads chaired by Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish. The Cabinet works to improve the coordination of services between departments. The Early Childhood Action Network (ECAN) is a committee of the Cabinet focused on children birth to 5 and their families. Its membership includes about 40 stakeholders from diverse perspectives. This group has been developing New Mexico’s early childhood strategic plan and action agenda since 2004 with funding from the federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant. Child Development Board members are active ECAN participants, representing early learning issues.

Some of the Child Development Board’s recent activities focused on infants and toddlers include:

- Adding a new Family Infant Toddler career lattice pathway for those mentoring and coaching adults who work with infants and toddlers
- Incorporating infant mental health competencies into the Family Infant Toddler specialization
- Establishing state-issued Associates and Bachelors degree certifications for those in the Family Infant Toddler career pathway, especially for early interventionists and home visitors
- Creating criteria and expected outcomes for home visiting programs
- Developing early learning outcomes for infants and toddlers as part of an early learning continuum for children birth through kindergarten

Although the Governor has not yet named the State Advisory Council under the Head Start reauthorization, it is expected that the Child Development Board will be designated. When designated, the board will expand its membership for this function and utilize ad hoc and standing committees for various Advisory Council activities.

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## Activities of State Advisory Councils: Implications for Infants and Toddlers

### RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

- **Assess the needs of and services for infants, toddlers, and their families.**
- **Examine the status and needs of the infant-toddler workforce.**
- **Develop and implement early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers.**
- **Focus at least one of the state's short-term priorities specifically on infants and toddlers.**
- **Address the needs of infants and toddlers within 0 – 5 strategies.**
- **Include outcomes for infants and toddlers and gather the data needed to evaluate progress.**

### State Decisions about Council Activities

Although State Advisory Councils are created under Head Start reauthorization, their charge is much broader than Head Start programs. State Advisory Councils are responsible for all of the policies and services that comprise a system of early childhood education and care designed to promote school preparedness. Each state's Council is to develop a statewide "strategic report," incorporate public comment, and then periodically review its implementation.

One of the first steps in creating a comprehensive state plan is to develop a clear vision for young children and their families and a set of basic values or principles around which the group can unite. Federal law requires periodic statewide needs assessments of the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs for children from birth to school entry. A thorough analysis of the needs of the state's young children, current services and resources, and successes on which to build will assist Councils in focusing their efforts. The creation of a long-term plan, with a timeline over a period of years, must be paired with an implementation plan that outlines incremental strategies as the focus of more immediate action. Kagan refers to the creation of aligned long-term and implementation plans as "having a dream *and* developing sequentially and systematically the process to achieve it."<sup>13</sup> Councils should establish benchmarks and track progress toward meeting their long-term outcomes.

The creation of aligned long-term and implementation plans are like "having a dream *and* developing sequentially and systematically the process to achieve it."<sup>13</sup>

Improved coordination of programs and supports for young children is a major purpose of State Advisory Councils. Federal statute specifies that Councils identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among various programs and services, including the responsible state agencies. The National Governors Association's 2007 survey of state early childhood advisory councils found that all seek to increase coordination with early care and education programs, and



most coordinate with health (97%), mental health (90%), home visiting (90%), and early intervention/special education (87%) services. Ninety percent of the councils identify or address barriers to the integration of federal and state early education and care services.<sup>14</sup>

Other federally required tasks of State Advisory Councils relate to:

- *Availability and access*—increasing the participation of children in existing child care and early childhood education programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations
- *Data*—establishing a unified data collection system for early childhood education and development services
- *Quality*—developing or improving high-quality, comprehensive early learning standards
- *Professional development*—establishing statewide professional development plans for early childhood educators and assessing the capacity and effectiveness of institutions of higher education toward supporting the development of early childhood educators<sup>15</sup>

Most existing early childhood advisory councils engage in these same types of activities. According to the National Governors Association survey:

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of councils assess the availability of high-quality pre-kindergarten and child care programs.
- Over half (52%) assess the availability of other child development services such as health, mental health, and home visiting.
- 77 percent focus on early learning outcomes and standards.
- Almost all (92%) create early childhood professional development plans and assist institutions of higher education with articulation agreements.
- Other common activities include communication (77%), professional development and training (74%), technical assistance (71%), and service coordination (71%).<sup>16</sup>



Existing early childhood advisory councils engage in quality improvement, professional development, and planning to improve services and coordinate the various sectors that interact with families of infants and toddlers.



Other tasks may be assigned to the State Advisory Council at the Governor's discretion. States may wish to include activities such as:

- Public awareness and engagement campaigns
- Development and use of program standards across various early childhood programs
- Support to collaborative groups at the local level
- Development and implementation of quality rating and improvement systems
- Creation and use of a common set of outcomes and indicators for young children
- Establishment of a new financing mechanism

### Focusing on Infants and Toddlers in Council Activities

State Advisory Councils will have many priorities competing for attention. Unless there is an intentional focus on the youngest children, their needs may not rise to the top. As Councils develop statewide plans and the priorities on which they will concentrate, the following recommendations can assure that issues related to infants and toddlers receive adequate attention.

**Assess the needs of and services for infants, toddlers, and their families.** Councils should pay particular attention to gathering both demographic data and information about the availability and quality of services for infants and toddlers. It may be more difficult to break out information by age groups, but it can lead to rich data about how well the needs of the state's youngest children are being met. This knowledge can be used to inform the planning process and choose focus areas where improvement is most necessary.

**Examine the status and needs of the infant-toddler workforce.** Caring for infants and toddlers, especially in group care settings, requires a level of specialized knowledge and skill that is unique to the developmental needs of these early foundational years. Yet, those who are working with infants and toddlers and



State Advisory Councils should examine the status and needs of the infant-toddler workforce because they require a specialized level of knowledge and skill that is unique to the developmental needs of the early foundational years.

## STATE PROFILE: OHIO

# Early Childhood Cabinet and Early Childhood Advisory Council



In March 2007, newly elected Governor Ted Strickland signed an executive order establishing an Early Childhood Cabinet to set state policy and coordinate programs serving Ohio children from prenatal through kindergarten. This action united key state agencies around a common goal of promoting school readiness. The Cabinet is composed of the heads of the Departments of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, Education, Health, Job and Family Services, Mental Health, and Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. The Governor also appointed a director to staff the Cabinet.

An Early Childhood Advisory Council was convened in August 2008 to advise the Cabinet on policy and resource development priorities, suggest options for the Cabinet's consideration, assist with communication strategies, and ensure compliance with the requirements of Head Start reauthorization. The Council merged an early childhood group assisting with Governor Strickland's transition and the Build Ohio board, with the addition of some new members to meet the Head Start requirements. The 45-member Council includes a diverse array of primarily private stakeholders from early childhood programs, schools, higher education, foundations, and other groups.

Beginning in September 2008, directors of the Head Start State Collaboration and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems projects began to share the responsibility of staffing the Advisory Council and Cabinet, along with the director of the Cabinet. The Advisory Council will also serve as the advisory group for both projects.

The Early Childhood Cabinet and its Advisory Council work in tandem to ensure that all children have access to high quality early childhood experiences so that every child is socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually prepared to use his or her capabilities to succeed. They have adopted the comprehensive definition of a system from the national Early Childhood System Builders' Workgroup. Support for their work is provided by a combination of federal funds (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families administration, Head Start Collaboration, and Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems) and private funds (Build Initiative and local foundations).

The Cabinet and Advisory Council are implementing the

recommendations from a number of previous plans. They have developed a visual framework, which includes principles, goals, outcomes, and system strategies to guide their work.

Work groups of the Cabinet are focusing on:

- *Articulation*—advising the Board of Regents in developing a seamless articulation pathway for early education practitioners through the 2-year and 4-year higher education system
- *Interagency child identifier*—initiating a common unique identification number for children entering Ohio's early childhood programs to facilitate linkages across state agency information systems
- *Fiscal model*—developing a fiscal model on the costs of improving quality through Ohio's quality rating and improvement system
- *Professional development*—integrating qualifications and training requirements for early care and education teachers, technical assistance and coaching supports, and multiple professional databases
- *Social and emotional development*—providing a comprehensive continuum of care for young children, which includes promotion, prevention, early and periodic screening, assessment, early intervention, treatment services, and supports to ensure appropriate individualized service delivery

Infants and toddlers are at the center of several initiatives of Ohio's Cabinet and Advisory Council, including:

- Conducting ongoing training on Ohio's infant-toddler early learning guidelines
- Developing implementation guides and training on program standards for out-of-home settings serving infants and toddlers
- Reviewing the Help Me Grow early intervention and home visiting program and making recommendations
- Deciding how the state can better support prenatal health and provide child development information during pregnancy

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supporting their families frequently lack training and mentoring specific to this period of development. As Councils assess workforce needs and design and implement a professional development system, they should pay particular attention to the education, support, and compensation of their state's infant-toddler professionals.

**Develop and implement early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers.** Early learning guidelines describe expectations about what infants and toddlers should know and be able to do during specified age ranges. At least 22 states have developed early learning guidelines for children birth to 3 or birth to 5/kindergarten, and other states are in the process.<sup>17</sup> State Advisory Councils in states that have not embarked on this process should take the lead and should ensure that standards for infants and toddlers are included. States can assure widespread use of the guidelines by disseminating them to infant-toddler professionals, providing training, and creating incentives through professional development and quality rating and improvement systems.

**Focus at least one of the state's immediate priorities specifically on infants and toddlers.** In addition to developing or revising and implementing early learning guidelines for infants and toddlers, states may wish to consider strategies for immediate action such as:

- Expanding access to Early Head Start by extending the day or year of existing Early Head Start services, increasing the number of children and pregnant women served by Early Head Start programs, helping child care providers deliver services meeting Early Head Start standards, or supporting Early Head Start-child care partnerships to improve the quality of care<sup>18</sup>
- Designing and implementing an infant-toddler credential, which formally recognizes individuals working with infants and toddlers who complete specialized education and training requirements<sup>19</sup>
- Developing an Infant-Toddler Specialist Network of individuals who offer training and support to professionals who provide early care and education to infants and toddlers
- Establishing a new financing mechanism, such as a set-aside or endowment, to specifically fund services for infants, toddlers, and their families

**Address the needs of infants and toddlers within 0–5 strategies.** As State Advisory Councils choose activities on which to focus, it is key that the strategies intentionally include an emphasis on infants and toddlers. For example:

- Leverage increases in public awareness and political will to invest early into improved services for infants and toddlers.
- Include quality indicators for infants and toddlers in the various elements of the state's quality rating and improvement system—standards, accountability measures, program and practitioner outreach and support, financial incentives, and parent/consumer education efforts.<sup>20</sup>
- Reach out to family, friend, and neighbor providers who care for infants and toddlers.

## STATE PROFILE: VIRGINIA

# The Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives



As former Governor Mark Warner was proposing his final budget in December 2005, he launched the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation as a public-private partnership to foster Smart Beginnings for all young children in Virginia. Governor Tim Kaine, who succeeded Warner, embraced the mission of the Smart Beginnings initiative. In August 2006, Governor Kaine issued an executive directive establishing the Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives. This multi-agency policy group is part of the Governor's Office, chaired by the Secretary of Education, and staffed by the Director of the Office of Early Childhood Development. The executive directive specified that the Working Group include the Secretaries of Education, Finance, Health and Human Resources, and Commerce and Trade; the State Superintendent of Public Instruction; the Commissioners of Health, Mental Health, Medical Assistance, and Social Services; as well as the heads of the community college system, the higher education council, and the state's economic development partnership. Other representatives have been added: the Head Start Collaboration director and chairs of the Start Strong Council, Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, School Readiness Task Force, and Star Quality Advisory Team. Responsibilities of the Working Group are to coordinate the Governor's early childhood initiatives, advise on the Start Strong four-year-old pre program, identify opportunities to maximize resources, and strengthen partnerships to build commitment to early childhood education.

Virginia has merged seven statewide plans, including the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan, into Virginia's Plan for Smart Beginnings. Co-led by the Governor's Working Group and the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, the plan serves as a roadmap for the early childhood agenda. Each of the plan's five goals includes system and child outcomes and data elements to measure progress.

Other current initiatives of the Governor's Working Group include:

- Piloting Virginia's quality rating and improvement system, which is aligned with their early learning

guidelines/program standards and professional competencies

- Increasing collaborative efforts among early childhood home visiting programs, including common training modules and shared indicators for evaluation
- Designing an effective system for defining and assessing school readiness
- Developing a coordinated system of professional development for the early childhood workforce

Issues related to infants and toddlers have been part of the Working Group's agenda. The Commissioner of Health is a pediatrician, and the Secretary of Health and Human Resources has a strong interest in infant mortality. Some of the group's accomplishments related to very young children are:

- Initiating an Infant Toddler Specialist Network
- Piloting the toddler CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) instrument in the quality rating and improvement system
- Developing early learning guidelines
- Piloting a common referral form through the Part C early intervention program, which is now being adapted by other programs

As Virginia looks toward implementing the requirement for a State Advisory Council, the membership of the Working Group will be analyzed to determine whether other members need to be added.

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**Include outcomes for infants and toddlers and gather the data needed to evaluate progress.**

Development of a core set of outcomes and indicators for young children and their families provides a means of shared accountability. While Councils alone cannot be held accountable for improving children's lives, they can focus stakeholders on working together to achieve results. Outcomes that include the many areas of a young child's development should be included and mechanisms should be developed to collect the data necessary to track progress.

## Moving Ahead

In establishing State Advisory Councils under the 2007 reauthorization of Head Start, states have an opportunity to build a comprehensive system for young children, including infants and toddlers. As states create or designate Councils and undertake planning and implementation, the following guidance is offered to promote a cohesive approach.

**Review existing state-level coordinating and governance structures and consider streamlining.**

Many states have multiple planning and governance structures at the state level. The requirement to establish a State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care can offer the opportunity for states to take stock of these collaborative groups, map out how they relate to one another, consider possible consolidation, and decide whether an existing body can serve as the Council with or without some modifications in its charge and membership.

**Build on previous work.** In most cases, states will not need to "start from scratch" in developing a comprehensive system for young children. The Council's needs assessment process should examine existing plans such as the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems plan, recommendations from previous reports, programs and initiatives with proven effectiveness, and local innovations that might be brought to scale at a state level.

**Promote alignment and integration.** As Councils develop new programs or initiatives, the best strategy is to align them with existing systems rather than creating parallel efforts.<sup>21</sup> The charges of Councils present an opportunity to better integrate various services for young children by developing common standards for programs and personnel. Councils may also choose to work on increasing the alignment between initiatives such as early learning and program standards, professional development, and quality rating and improvement systems.

**Focus explicitly on infants and toddlers.** While Councils are charged with covering children from birth to school entry, infants and toddlers have unique needs. Without a particular emphasis on this age group, services and policies to support their development may be patchy at best.

**Ensure balanced investments across the system.** States cannot stop with one specific age group or issue. Focusing does not mean ignoring other parts of the system or advancing one at the expense of another. Councils should prioritize strategically, avoid compromising existing programs, and balance investments across the system over time.<sup>22</sup>



## Conclusion

The science of early childhood confirms the importance of the earliest years of life in setting a developmental course for children. States are exploring the expansion of services for young children, but a comprehensive system to promote the development of infants and toddlers is far from established. The 2007 reauthorization of Head Start offers an opportunity to put infants and toddlers at the forefront through State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care. These Councils can improve the availability, quality, and coordination of services for young children. When undertaken strategically, such planning and coordinating structures can be a means of achieving positive outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families.





For more information about Early Head Start and the 2007 Head Start reauthorization, see ***Learning, Thriving, and Ready to Succeed: Infants and Toddlers in Early Head Start.***

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## About Us

The ZERO TO THREE Policy Center is a nonpartisan, research-based resource for federal and state policymakers and advocates on the unique developmental needs of infants and toddlers. To learn more about this topic or about the ZERO TO THREE Policy Center, please visit our website at [www.zerotothree.org/policy](http://www.zerotothree.org/policy).



National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

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