



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

***KEEPING THE COURSE:
Mapping the Journey to High Quality for Mississippi's Early Care and Education System***

December 2010



The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (Public Law 110-134), {42 USC 9801 et seq.}, requires the Governor of each state to designate or establish a council to serve as the State Early Childhood Advisory Council on early childhood education and care for children from birth to school entry, and to designate an individual to coordinate activities of the Council. The purpose of a State Early Childhood Advisory Council is to bring together administrators, policy advisors, and other key stakeholders to advise on the development of a comprehensive system of coordinated services for young children in the state. Governor Haley Barbour filed an Executive Order in 2009 (#1028) with the Secretary of State's office to formally designate the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council.

The Act not only requires the Governor of each state to designate or establish a council, but designates a non-competitive grant opportunity to each state to utilize in establishing a means to turn recommendations into reality. During 2010, the council focused on writing the grant proposal and secured \$1,521,067 for use over the next three years. With the funding in hand, the Council will implement the recommendations appearing in the proposal through agency directives, memoranda of understanding and formation of new partnerships.

SECAC-MS VISION

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council of Mississippi (SECAC-MS) is committed to the vision of one coordinated system of quality care and education for Mississippi's children birth to five. Mississippi's young children and their families deserve a comprehensive system that provides equal access to quality care and education and quality services and supports needed for school success and lifelong learning. Through interagency collaboration, the State Early Childhood Advisory Council is committed to developing a stronger early childhood infrastructure built on existing early care and education systems and components to ensure coordinated service delivery at the community and state level for all of Mississippi's young children.

Accomplishments of the Council in Meeting 2009 Recommendations

- Created a website and blog to encourage general public to review the Council's work and establish an accessible means for the public to communicate with the Council on issues of importance.
- Improved access to educational opportunities for teachers of infants and toddlers through implementing training on early learning guidelines and corresponding curriculum.
- Assisted in the development of curriculum to assist teachers in the teaching of activities that address the development of infants and toddlers per infant/toddler early learning guidelines with training conducted statewide through the MS Child Care Resource & Referral (MSCCR&R) network.
- Created a data collection system for comprehensive public early childhood education and development programs throughout Mississippi. The data on children receiving child care subsidies, teacher training provided through the MSCCR&R network and the rating of participating child care programs in the MS Quality Step System was included in a discussion of the P-20 data system at the Council meeting in December, 2010. The Council applied for and received a grant from the Children's Defense Fund to develop a plan to obtain data from other state agencies such as Departments of Education, Medicaid, Health and Mental Health, which will continue in 2011.
- Recommended a pilot of the T.E.A.C.H. program in the state and a career ladder in conjunction with the Dept of Human Services using funds from the grant awarded to the Council by the Department of Health and Human Services. The pilot career ladder and T.E.A.C.H. program will be implemented in 2011 pending full Council approval.

The Impact of Federal and Private Funding on Council Activities

The application for federal funds over the next three years was a major focus of the Council's work during 2010. The work proved to be successful in securing the funds, due in part by a match provided by private and foundation funding, to meet the identified milestones over the next three years that will improve early care and education programs and the system which supports those programs.

The following goals are outlined in the grant application for completion in 2011. These goals will serve as the objectives of the Council over the next 12 months.

- **Develop a data sharing system that is inclusive of core data elements from the Mississippi Departments of Education (MDE), Health(MDH), Human Services (MDHS), Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), State Board for Community Colleges (SBCJC), the Head Start Collaboration Office and others to be named;**
- **Sponsor a work process study for MDHS, MSDH, and MDE for the purpose of determining a model for optimizing early childhood health, early childhood education, and well-being services that will be piloted in four communities in year two of the grant;**
- **Develop a voluntary registration process for family child care providers for communication purposes around training and emergency preparedness planning;**
- **Develop and implement a career ladder for early care and education teachers with a method of providing compensation for career/educational advancements;**
- **Develop a review of state health practices for children 0-4 years of age for the purpose of streamlining current processes more efficiently, starting with the removal of administrative barriers to families to enroll their eligible children.**

In September 2010 the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the Mississippi Department of Health submitted the application for home-based parent education that was funded through the new Federal health care reform. The program is scheduled to be implemented in summer 2011 and involves a combination of parent engagement/education models. In addition to the goals outlined in the grant application, the Council will continue to work on issues that have not been resolved from 2010 such as reduction of barriers that prevent eligible children from gaining access to health insurance.

APPROPRIATION REQUESTS FY2012

- The Council requests that the Mississippi Department of Human Services current budgetary allocation for the Mississippi Child Care Quality Rating System and Child Care Resource and Referral System remain intact.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BEYOND FY2011

The recommendations for consideration beyond 2011 build on those presented in this report and are critical to the overall and on-going improvement regarding the health and education of Mississippi's young children.

- Provide resources annually to early care and education programs so they will meet Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System standards at a minimum of a step three of the five step rating system.
- Increase opportunities for children birth to three years of age of low-income families to participate in high quality community based in-home early childhood education programs.
- Align the early learning standards (0-4 years) and core state standards for kindergarten–grade 12 by 2012.
- Increase funding to *Nurturing Homes*, a program funded by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, to provide registration services and technical assistance to teachers in non-licensed family child care homes for

the purpose of improving the educational quality of the program offered to children in those settings by December 2011.

- Develop and implement a plan by 2015 that would eventually require all licensed early care and education centers to participate in the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System that includes a financial plan for implementation and maintenance.
- Develop a plan for dissemination of a parent information packet that would be made available to all parents by 2012 upon the birth of their baby to provide them with developmental milestones, identification of parent resources and how to access them as their child's first teachers.
- Develop and implementation plan by 2014 to address access to health services for young children to include reduction in redundancies in paperwork and conflicting regulations for eligibility across multiple programs, review of the feasibility and cost effectiveness of adjusting state policies and practices to meet national standards and/or to reduce redundancy and conflicting requirements, service gaps in remote areas of the state and use of alternate measures such as telemedicine, mobile units or patient navigators.
- Develop and implement training modules to enhance the knowledge of health care professionals about specific needs and concerns for young children and their families by 2012.
- Conduct a review of existing preventative health services by 2013, including the state vaccination program, medical home model and EPSDT, to identify barriers to participation and to suggest strategies to encourage and promote the accessibility and use of preventive health care.
- Support a readiness assessment of 4 year old children that encompasses all developmental domains.

RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: KINDERGARTEN AND ELEMENTARY GRADES (K-3):

As young children enter public school, their school lives are just beginning; and for that reason the Council makes the following recommendations in the context of supporting a child's movement toward school success and as a step in preventing school drop outs.

- Increase evidence-based training for school administrators in early childhood education, especially elementary principals.
- Re-evaluate the transition practices and systems alignment followed when children enter kindergarten from early childhood education programs or from the child's home to ensure a seamless transfer for the child that will not interrupt or interfere with learning.
- Implement an age appropriate assessment of children in kindergarten through grade three across the state by 2012 to determine the progress children are making in reading and math skill acquisition.
- Develop a consistent state-wide skill-based progress report form for parents of children in grades pre-k through grade 3 by 2013.

CONCLUSION

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council has succinctly crafted a plan by which early care and education services are anchored at the local level and connected community by community through the statewide systems that focus on young children and their families. This plan is mapped out and defined so that the individuals and agencies charged to bring life to the words are not left with questions. With talk of dropout prevention programs, work force development and economic uncertainty, this report has even greater meaning and urgency. Regardless of the current financial situation, now is the time for the efficient and effective use of Mississippi intelligence and spirit to move the early childhood agenda forward. With the implementation of the recommendations submitted in this report, the quality of life for current and future generations of preschool children and their families will be greatly improved. It is not just the right and smart thing to do; it is the **only** thing that will ensure we leave our children the legacy they deserve.