

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council

Report to Governor Haley Barbour

Launching a System of Early Care and Education for Mississippi's Preschool Children

Executive Summary



December 2008

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The *State Early Childhood Advisory Council's Report 2008: Launching A System of Care and Education for Mississippi's Preschool Children* makes sensible and responsible recommendations to the Governor and the State Head Start Collaboration Director for their response and subsequent action. Some of the recommendations have been made before but appear in this report in a different context. The implementation strategies provided for each of the six recommendations reflect best practices and are affordable – even in these serious financial times. The report's overarching message is that Mississippi's preschool children need access to a coordinated system of care and education.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Reauthorization Act, signed by the President on December 12, 2007, 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 designate an individual to coordinate activities of the Council. In most states, the early care and education programs that provide support to young children are spread across government agencies, funded through different sources, and delivered through multiple public and private providers in communities. The purpose of a State Early Childhood Advisory Council is to bring together agency/program administrators to think collectively about how to better coordinate services so young children have the comprehensive supports in place that they need. In April 2008, Governor Haley Barbour established the State Early Childhood Advisory Council by Executive Order. The Governor appointed Dr. Cathy Grace, Director of the Mississippi State University, Early Childhood Institute, to serve as the Council Chair and members to include, to the extent possible, the representatives as described in the Head Start Act as amended. The State Early Childhood Advisory Council is committed to the vision of one coordinated system of quality care and education for Mississippi's children birth to five.

The findings reported by the National Center on Children in Poverty (2007) condense the results of numerous research studies into two overarching guidelines that framed the work of the Council:

1. Compelling research supports the lifelong importance of early childhood development.
2. There is hard economic evidence that smart investments in early childhood education yield long term gains.

The Council's recommendations are presented below for review. The entire discussion and rationale for each can be found in the full report.

- The Governor will appoint an Executive Director for the State Early Childhood Advisory Council through which programs and services related to the education, health, mental health and social services for children (and their families) prior to birth through age eight will be better coordinated.

- Develop a family/child-centered information/data system and sharing process that will ensure significant improvement in the delivery of high quality early care and education services. The process will be built around a logic model where information collected will serve to improve the system or service(s) in question.
- Develop and implement a work force development plan for individuals seeking to be employed as early childhood educators.
- Develop a process by which early childhood services and management occurs for the purpose of supplying communities with information and coordinated service models for replication across the state
- Review and revise the existing registry requirements related to family child care homes
- Develop and implement a process by which health access issues are addressed for children ages zero to five.

Council's FY2010 State Appropriation Requests

- Funding in the amount proposed by the Mississippi Department of Human Services for the Mississippi Quality Child Care Step System be passed by the Mississippi Legislature
- Funding in the amount proposed by the Mississippi Department of Human Services for The Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral System be passed by the Mississippi legislature
- Funding in the amount proposed by the Mississippi Department of Education for The Early Learning Collaboration Grant Program be passed by the Mississippi Legislature
- Funding in the amount proposed by the Mississippi State Department of Health for the Child Care Facilities Licensure Division be passed by the Mississippi Legislature

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 ready for launch and is defined so that the individuals and agencies charged to bring life to the words are not left with questions. For over 20 years Mississippi's youngest children have waited while other constituencies have been given their deserved support through policy decisions, funding and/or resource allocations. With talk of drop -out prevention programs, work force development and economic uncertainty this report has even greater meaning and urgency.

Since Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi has been recognized nationally as a state that even in the worst of times takes care of its own. 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 pre-school 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.

This Executive Summary was prepared by the
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