



Early Care and Education Fact Sheets

Advisory Council on Early Care and Education A mechanism to plan a statewide system of early care and education

BACKGROUND

In 2007 the Congress passed legislation requiring all states to establish or designate a state advisory council to build a statewide system of early care and education for children. According to a fall 2007 survey¹ of the National Governor's Association (NGA), 31 states have at least one existing early childhood advisory council established to improve coordination across early education and child care programs. Many of the existing councils also focus on health services, home visiting, and special education.

HOW ARE EXISTING ADVISORY COUNCILS ORGANIZED?

According to the NGA survey:

- 52 percent were established by the state legislature and 23 percent by executive order
- 42 percent are stand-alone entities and 32 percent reside within a state department
- 55 percent report to the governor's office and 32 percent to the legislature

Connections to Governor's office and key state departments: A researcher who has reviewed the efforts of existing advisory councils suggests that those with clear direction and connections with the Governor's Office and meaningful leadership from top-level officials at state departments may be best positioned to be successful in moving an agenda.

Sufficient funding: While significant staff support to advisory councils has been in-kind state agency contributions, most councils have had direct funding to enhance their effectiveness, such as state general funds (36 percent), private donations/grants (36 percent), and/or child development block grant dollars (23), as well as other funding sources.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLABORATIVE WORK IN STATES

Pre-K Now, a national advocacy organization, determined eight lessons learned from the work of the existing advisory councils across the country in its report, *State Advisory Council: Creating Systems of Early Education and Care*.²

1. Begin with a broad vision. Despite the fact that the Advisory Council requirement came through Head Start legislation, the mission should go well beyond Head Start to include child care, pre-kindergarten, and services to children with special needs. The study cites the Illinois Early Learning Council as a group that built a broad vision by starting with key beliefs about early care and education, rather than immediately addressing policies and programs.

2. Cultivate champions. Involving elected officials, business and community leaders, law enforcement, and philanthropists can help build broad support for the council's recommendations. The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation plays a key role in its coordinating council, helping to build support for an endowment fund that focuses on children from birth through age 3.

3. Seek broad support and state legislation. Advisory councils should be bi-partisan and broad-based to assure longevity. The report cited the stability of the Early Childhood Collaborating Partners, supported by multiple governors and public instruction superintendents who are independently elected.

4. Build on successes; don't reinvent the wheel. States should build on successful collaboration that has already occurred, building on the experience and strength that is already there. New Mexico built on the work of its Child Development Board, established in 1989, leading to expansion of state-funded pre-k programs.

5. Nurture strong relationship between individuals. Personal relationships matter in collaborative groups. The report noted the successful efforts of Eau Claire, Wisconsin in building strong relationships across its diverse early care and education programs, leading to an exemplary collaborative 4-year-old kindergarten initiative.

6. Balance collaborative leadership with results. Councils often function well with co-chairs from different constituencies. Illinois' Early Learning Council draws on the expertise of 46 members and 200 subcommittee members to get good information and recommendations.

7. Stimulate and respond to local innovation and lessons. Connections with local communities can draw on best practices and avoid one-size-fits-all solutions. The report cites Wisconsin's efforts to meet the need for local collaboration coaches by combining funding from five different sources at the state level.

8. Build broad public awareness and support. Councils should consider the importance of public willingness to support investments in early care and education. For instance, Nebraska conducted a public awareness campaign about the importance of early childhood programs, leading to legislative action.

EFFECTIVE STATE EXAMPLES ³

Illinois: The Early Learning Council, which was established in statute in 2003, was an important catalyst for major new efforts to improve early learning for children ages birth to 5. The Council, whose co-chairs and 46 members are appointed by the Governor's Office, brings together representatives from diverse perspectives to develop research-based recommendations.

Nebraska: The Early Childhood Interagency Council worked collaboratively with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation on analysis that led to the creation of an early childhood education endowment funds, passed by a ballot initiative.

New Mexico: The Child Development Board provided recommendations that guided efforts toward expanded state-funded pre-k programs.

WISCONSIN CAN BUILD ON COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Wisconsin has a strong history in early care and education, with public schooling for 4-year-olds in its Constitution, and with strong efforts to assure health and safety in child care, affordable child care for low-income working families, state supplements for Head Start, and strong services to children and families with disabilities. Wisconsin stakeholders have been working for many years toward a system of early care and education through the work of the Wisconsin Early Childhood Collaborating Partners and with the recent establishment of the new Department of Children and Families and a new Division of Early Care and Education.

The Department of Public Instruction has worked with its Forces for Four Advisory Committee and with other departments to promote community approaches to 4-K. The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families promoted community-based 4-K through its planning grants to local communities with funding from the Joyce Foundation.

A well-designed Advisory Council on Early Care and Education could be the catalyst for a coherent plan for the future in the growing field of early care and education.

Helpful Resource:

Template for Creating State Advisory Councils on Early Education and Care

http://www.preknow.org/documents/policy/State_Advisory_Councils_June2008.pdf

Sources

1 NGA Center for Best Practices. (2008). Survey on Early Childhood Advisory Councils.

Website: <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0712EARLYCHILDCOUNCILSSURVEY.PDF>

2 Pre-K Now. (2008) State Advisory Councils: Creating Systems of Early Education and Care.

Website: http://www.preknow.org/documents/policy/State_Advisory_Councils_June2008.pdf

3 Pre-K Now (2008)

