

# All In For Kansas Kids



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**Early Childhood Strategic Plan**

➤ **2024**

The **2024 All In for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** was made possible due to the many Kansans who contributed their experiences, ideas, and feedback to strengthen and improve our system.

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# All In For Kansas Kids



## OUR COMMITMENT

A successful strategic plan requires, above all, a commitment to act on goals that help us achieve a shared vision. As state agencies leading the *All In For Kansas Kids* collaboration, we are ultimately responsible for this plan's implementation and monitoring of progress toward positive outcomes for Kansas children and families. We pledge to align our resources and actions in service of this plan. Simply stated, we are dedicated to ensuring that *every child thrives*.

We commit, by our endorsement below, to actively engage agency leaders, equip and empower our employees, and adapt to changing circumstances with foresight and agility. The Blueprint for Early Childhood guides our collaborative work across the ecosystem and helps us remain focused on our children's future. Together, we will navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and make meaningful contributions within our communities.

We invite you, the reader, to do the same. Join us in being *All In For Kansas Kids*.



## THE FIRST 5 YEARS

# 1 MILLION

New neural connections  
happen **every second** during  
the first few years of life!

Early relationships, experiences, and environment all heavily influence this critical period of brain development. With more **than 90% of a child's brain architecture developed by age five**<sup>1</sup>, there is no time to lose. Our efforts to prepare young Kansans for success hinge on the availability, accessibility, and quality of early childhood care and education. This early period of growth significantly impacts cognitive and social development, influencing future academic and lifelong success.

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## 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

# Background

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- Importance of Early Childhood
- What Do Our Youngest Kansans Need?
- 2024 Needs Assessment Key Findings
- Our Children's Future
- Guiding Principles
- Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem
- Framework

➤ When we invest in our youngest children, they are...

20%

more likely

to be well-prepared  
for kindergarten<sup>2</sup>

20%

more likely

to graduate from high school<sup>4</sup>

48%

less likely

to need special  
education services<sup>3</sup>

70%

less likely

to be arrested for a violent crime<sup>5</sup>

## Importance of Early Childhood

Children who experience high-quality programs and interventions demonstrate positive effects that last a lifetime. Because these programs promote healthy development, research shows they can reduce the need for more expensive interventions later in life, such as special education, grade repetition, substance use treatment, and incarceration.

High-quality early childhood programs and services set the stage for positive self-regulation and other protective factors that ultimately reduce the risk of adolescent substance use, becoming a teenage parent, and developing chronic illnesses like hypertension, obesity, stroke, and diabetes later in life.

Kansas children and families directly benefit from a high-quality early childhood ecosystem and so do the many committed professionals in the workforce who make early childhood their career. In fact, all of us benefit from an early childhood ecosystem that is high-quality, affordable, and accessible. Parents are more likely to be employed when child care and other early childhood services are plentiful and within reach. Strong labor force participation and enhanced buying power boost local economies. In turn, economically vibrant communities contribute to our state's overall prosperity.

*Investments in early childhood benefit all Kansans and pay dividends for decades.*



# What Do Our Youngest Kansans Need?

Kansas is home to 212,462 children birth through 5.<sup>6</sup> These youngest Kansans need consistent, safe, and high-quality experiences in their early years to ensure they can thrive. This requires supportive home environments, affordable and available early learning programs and services, and an early childhood workforce equipped to meet the unique needs of each child.

Unfortunately, past needs assessments conducted in Kansas reveal that far too many of these children and their families are struggling to meet basic needs and have difficulty accessing and navigating services to support their well-being. Current access is inequitable across the state with many communities lacking child care, home visiting services, early intervention specialists, and specialty health care providers. Even when available, finding and accessing these resources can be overly burdensome and time consuming for families. In many cases, services are out of reach due to a mismatch between each family and child's particular needs and what each family can realistically afford. While not uncommon to have this affordability gap for services at all ages, it is particularly difficult during the early childhood years when working parents are more likely to be just beginning their careers and earning entry-level wages.

## ORIGINS

Origins of this strategic plan date back to 2019 with the input of thousands of Kansans for the initial ***All In For Kansas Kids Needs Assessment***<sup>7</sup> and ***Strategic Plan***<sup>8</sup>. Over the past few years, Kansas activated a new governance structure and communication channels (see p. 42) set up by three consecutive Preschool Development B-5 grants<sup>9</sup> to strengthen engagement among early childhood partners, professionals, and families. Annual needs assessments—the most recent assessment completed in February 2024<sup>10</sup>—sparked ideas and innovations ultimately leading to creation of this ***2024 All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan***.

The array of services and supports our youngest Kansans need relies heavily on a robust workforce. Yet early childhood professionals face many obstacles—low wages, a lack of benefits, high turnover, burnout, and more—that impact both the availability and quality of care across our state. Kansas has a severe child care shortage, in part, because child care centers struggle to recruit and retain workers.

# 2024 Needs Assessment Key Findings

The most pressing needs of children, families, and the early childhood workforce are detailed in the **2024 All In For Kansas Kids Needs Assessment** and helped shape this plan.

## Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem

### COORDINATED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

 **Collaboration across state agencies and organizations has increased, creating greater efficiency and improved access to services.**

 **Inherent limitations remain in a coordinated governance model, including fiscal and regulatory differences across agencies, and a lack of a centralized decision-making authority. For families, this means they continue to experience a fragmented system that is often unresponsive to their needs or otherwise inaccessible.**



### DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING

 **Authorized projects were implemented under the Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust to analyze the impact of early childhood investments using cross-agency data. This work is just beginning; partners express a desire to more flexibly share data to take full analytical advantage of existing data to understand outcomes for families within the ecosystem.**

 **Navigating multiple layers of data sharing requirements is a persistent challenge.**



### PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

 **Multiple funding streams were blended and braided to support child care needs within the early childhood ecosystem.**



 **Responding to differing requirements on various timelines is challenging and requires creative solutions. We need to continue exploring ways to facilitate these partnerships and navigating constraints.**

## Early Childhood Workforce and Environments

### WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND RETENTION

✓ *Integrated initiatives are being launched to recruit, retain, and elevate highly qualified early childhood professionals.*

! *Many early childhood professionals do not earn livable wages and question how long they can remain in the field.*



### PROVIDER SUSTAINABILITY

✓ *Statewide strategies helped child care administrators keep their doors open despite workforce shortages, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

! *Sustainability of child care businesses without long-term investment is questionable.*



## Experiences of Children and Families

### BASIC NEEDS ARE FUNDAMENTAL

✓ *Kansas implements services and supports to address individual child and family needs, such as improving family functioning, promoting mental health, and finding employment.*

! *Many families cannot thrive because of barriers such as inadequate health care, inflexible employment opportunities, and low wages.*



### SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

✓ *Our youngest Kansans must have their basic needs met before they can lead future generations and thrive.*

! *Fragmented early childhood services and supports cannot ensure a desirable and sustainable future for children and families.*



# Our Children's Future

In a future where every child thrives, Kansas families are able to meet their basic needs, all children have opportunities to succeed, and, without exception, every child is cared for in safe, nurturing environments. These ideal environments are rich with language and interaction, providing many opportunities for young children to play, engage, explore, and learn.

Because we know that what happens in these early years has lifelong effects, we have a responsibility to maximize the benefits of this brief yet formative stage of life.

The infants, toddlers, and young children who live, learn, play, and grow within our state's early care environments today are our leaders of tomorrow and will determine the future prosperity of our state. As we continue to increase the number of high-quality early learning experiences and grow our workforce of nurturing, and highly qualified providers, we are helping make Kansas an attractive place to raise a family.

Creating this future for our children is the work of today and the ultimate aim of this **All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan**.

The first **All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** (2020) guided us on a journey toward a more unified early childhood ecosystem and anchored us through the disruptions of the past few years. This **2024 All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** again presents goals that will shape the next five years of the early childhood ecosystem and looks even further into the future—our children's future—to chart the course ahead.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles guided development of this plan. To be *All In For Kansas Kids*, join us in taking action that aligns with these ideals:

### **Child- and family-centered**

Seek parent ideas and feedback, reflect family voice in decision making, and ensure the plan improves the well-being of children and families across the lifespan.

### **Transparent and accountable**

Communicate often about the activities and progress of this plan. Practice continuous quality improvement toward long-term outcomes. Expect mutual transparency, accountability, and engagement across the early childhood ecosystem.

### **Strengths-based**

Use language and strategies that foster hope, ensure universal dignity, and describe ideal outcomes that Kansans believe are possible.

### **Data-driven**

Use the findings of needs assessments to make data-informed decisions about early childhood programs and services. Routinely seek input from Kansans and analyze data from multiple sources to ensure aligned policy recommendations, resource allocation, and programming decisions.

# What is the Early Childhood Ecosystem?

The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem is the robust system of programs, services, and infrastructure that support young children and their families to thrive. At the state level, this ecosystem is spread across four state agencies that each bring a range of funding sources, programs, and services to ensure positive early childhood experiences for Kansans.

Kansas has a long history of valuing early childhood and was the first state in the nation to establish a children’s trust fund in 1980. In 1999, landmark legislation dedicated Kansas’ annual payments from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement to the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund (Kansas Children’s Cabinet).

The Kansas Children’s Cabinet is charged with implementing a coordinated and comprehensive early childhood system, facilitating interagency cooperation, and advising the governor and legislature on investments in early childhood programs and services. To help meet this charge, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet developed the Blueprint for Early Childhood<sup>11</sup> (Blueprint). This visionary document guides state and local decision making in ways that promote healthy development, strong families, and early learning. These three building blocks inform both cross-agency collaboration and the work within communities to ensure that all children and families get the support they need to thrive. In 2015, the Kansas State Board of Education further elevated the importance of early childhood by incorporating Kindergarten Readiness as a key outcome to achieving the Kansans Can vision—Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

Significant federal investments in recent years have amplified this collaboration, resulting in a newly defined governance structure with mechanisms for elevating challenges and coordinating decisions across agencies and programs. New teams were established, including the **All In For Kansas Kids Leadership Team**<sup>12</sup> (formerly the State Directors Team) and the Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel,<sup>13</sup> and existing teams were re-energized, such as the Child Care Systems Improvement Team<sup>14</sup> and the Workforce Development Advisory Group.<sup>15</sup>

## Blueprint for Early Childhood

### Foundational Building Blocks



#### Healthy Development

Kansas children and families thrive when they have equitable access to comprehensive health and developmental services.



#### Strong Families

Kansas children and families are stronger when their basic needs are met.



#### Early Learning

Kansas children are prepared for success in kindergarten and beyond when their families have equitable access to quality care and early learning environments.

# Who is in the Early Childhood Ecosystem?

While all Kansans share in the opportunity to ensure our youngest citizens thrive, many of us work in programs and services that interact in the early childhood ecosystem to promote healthy development, early learning, and strong families. Examples of ecosystem components—programs, job roles, funding sources—are shown on the following page.

As in any ecosystem, components of the Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem interact in complex and symbiotic ways to deliver impact. The Blueprint describes how these interactions result in positive early childhood experiences. We have revised the language used to describe the former “mixed-delivery system” as a healthy, sustainable ecosystem rooted in thriving communities.

## Thriving communities are critical to ecosystem functioning

When there is community-level buy-in from both public and private leaders to help strengthen families, invest in early learning, and support healthy development, our youngest Kansans and their families benefit. We are fortunate to have examples of thriving communities in all corners of our state. In these places, families experience a connected early childhood system where they can seamlessly navigate the full range of services needed to thrive. The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem visual below reflects the foundational role of thriving communities to healthy, efficient ecosystem functioning.



The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem components below represent the scale and diversity of programs, job roles, and funding sources routinely interacting in thriving communities; it is not intended to be an exhaustive list. However, these are all critical investment areas and serve as calls to action. Because ecosystems are interdependent, gaps in service have ripple effects that need to be addressed holistically. The goals and actions of this strategic plan guide us toward solutions that strengthen services across the ecosystem and focus on those that have the greatest impact on the lives of young children and their families.

### Child Care



- Family Child Care
- Child Care Centers
- Head Start
- Child Care Assistance
- Out-of-School Programming

### Health Care



- Family/Primary Care Doctors
- Pediatricians, OBGYNs, and Midwives
- Immunizations and Newborn Screening
- Food and Nutrition Resources
- Federally Qualified Health Centers

### Pre-K to 12 Education



- Preschool Education
- Early Childhood Special Education (Part B)
- Kindergarten Transitions
- Literacy and Reading Supports
- School Health

### Family Supports



- Economic Assistance (TANF, etc.)
- Housing Supports
- Child and Family Well-Being
- Dept. of Corrections Programs for Parents
- Employment Services

### Crisis Services



- Care Coordination
- Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention
- Family Preservation Services
- Substance Use Disorder Supports

### Home Visiting



- Parent Education
- Universal Home Visiting (MCH)
- Parents as Teachers
- Healthy Families Initiatives
- Early Head Start
- MIECHV and Family First
- 1-800-CHILDREN

### Prenatal and Maternal Support



- SIDS Network
- Kansas Perinatal Community Collaboratives
- Doula Services
- WIC Programs
- SUD Support for Pregnant Women

### Early Intervention/ Developmental Disability



- ASQ Screening
- Kansas Early Childhood Developmental Services (Part C)
- Infant/Toddler Specialist Network
- Kansas Inservice Training
- Special Health Care Supports
- Child Occupational and Physical Therapists

### Mental/Behavioral Health



- Maternal Depression Screening
- Child Mental Health Specialists
- Mental Health Providers/Practices
- Local Health Departments
- Behavioral Health Specialists

## Blueprint Building Blocks

The icons remind us that each sector is critical to meeting the vision guided by the Blueprint and detailed in our *All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan* vision.



**Healthy  
Development**



**Strong  
Families**



**Early  
Learning**

# Framework

This strategic plan is organized to follow the **2024 All In For Kansas Kids Needs Assessment** with goals and actions arranged into three pillars of emphasis: the ecosystem as a whole, the workforce and learning environments, and the experiences of children and families. Goals, actions, and metrics are listed for each pillar after a brief introduction. Goals broadly describe priorities and direction. Actions prioritize and streamline the work ahead while allowing flexibility for ecosystem members to design their own detailed workplans and timelines. Metrics are intended to measure progress toward goals, and while not a one-to-one match for each action, they capture what it means to achieve strategic plan deliverables over time.

## Strategic Plan Organizational Framework

### Pillars



Ecosystem



Early Childhood Workforce & Environments



Experiences of Children & Families

### Goals, Actions, and Metrics

**GOAL 1** Statement of overall desired outcome

#### Actions

1.1 Detailed steps to achieve the desired outcome

#### Progress Tracking Plan

➤ Data points to know we're going in the right direction or where to make improvements.





## PILLAR 1

# Ecosystem

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When we speak of early childhood in Kansas, we are describing an ecosystem focused on young children and their families centered around the Blueprint’s three Building Blocks—Strong Families, Early Learning, and Healthy Development. This ecosystem, depicted in the graphic on page 14, includes programs and resources from the state; the systems in which these resources are funded, administered, and evaluated; and the environment of local programming and community services designed to support thriving children and families. The early childhood ecosystem also considers other supports families may need to thrive, such as health care, behavioral health services, and employment supports.

With a focus on family well-being in addition to services that directly support young children, partners across our early childhood ecosystem are collaborating more than ever before. Kansas leaders have been shifting from insulated work within individual state agencies and moving toward more unified decision making, data sharing, and cross-cutting solutions. Goals and actions in this pillar are crafted to guide continued collaboration and to prioritize child and family well-being most efficiently to meet a wide range of needs. This Pillar is also about nurturing the ecosystem by creating new resources, increasing capacity, forming public-private partnerships, and using data to improve outcomes for all Kansas children and families.

➤ **When we invest in high-quality early childhood programs and services, we can expect a...**



**13% Return on investment**

through better education, health, and social outcomes.



Participants in high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate higher educational and employment outcomes, reduced school suspensions, and greater physical and relationship health compared to peers.<sup>16</sup>

➤ **The benefits of high-quality early childhood programs have also been shown to carry on to the next generation.**



Early childhood education strengthens families and can break the cycle of poverty.<sup>17</sup>

➤ **Goal 1** Strengthen the continuum of early childhood services through widespread collaboration across state and local partners.

➤ **Goal 2** Connect families to the right service at the right time through comprehensive networks of resources and programs.

➤ **Goal 3** Measure impact across the full continuum of early childhood services over time and use the data to make changes that reduce disparities and improve outcomes for children.

➤ **Goal 4** Promote agreements between public and private sectors to expand early childhood initiatives.

➤ **Goal 5** Support policies and initiatives that increase capacity, enhance quality, improve access to services, and contribute to economic security for families.

➤ **Goal 6** Strengthen existing tools and create new resources to ensure providers offer families seamless transitions in support of their child's interests, healthy social-emotional development, and academic potential.

# GOAL 1

Strengthen the continuum of early childhood services through widespread collaboration across state and local partners.

## Actions

- 1.1** Formalize decision-making authority for the continuum of early childhood services to support accountability, transparency, and data-informed initiatives for children, families, and the workforce.
- 1.2** Improve consistency of expectations around early childhood services contracted by and funded through state agencies to reduce administrative inefficiencies and align data collection efforts.
- 1.3** Ensure all early childhood funding decisions made by state agencies are mapped to strategic plan goals or actions.
- 1.4** Enhance coordination across home visiting service models.
- 1.5** Identify Strategic Plan Action Leads and develop a transparent, adaptive, and inclusive process for enacting the plan and monitoring progress toward goals.
- 1.6** Ensure early childhood providers and families are included in all local or state emergency response planning efforts to help young children and families navigate and recover from disruptions (e.g. natural disasters, pandemics, cyber-attacks).
- 1.7** Ensure all state agencies and departments understand their impact and connection to the early childhood ecosystem.

## Progress Tracking Plan

- Creation of a strategic plan monitoring process with assigned reporting responsibilities.
- The number of state agencies and local partners reporting as part of the monitoring process.

## GOAL 2

Connect families to the right service at the right time through comprehensive networks of resources and programs.

### Actions

- 2.1** Inventory existing local networks that help families connect to services. Promote successful models and encourage community adoption and implementation of “no wrong door” approaches for families.
- 2.2** Capture and communicate the bright spots and lessons learned around referral and care coordination networks in local communities. Use [allforkansaskids.org](http://allforkansaskids.org), governance group communication channels, and community coalition meetings to promote peer-to-peer learning and widespread adoption of proven practices.
- 2.3** Increase family uptake of 1-800-CHILDREN<sup>18</sup> as a trusted information source. Increase provider awareness of the resource directory behind 1-800-CHILDREN to facilitate provider-to-provider referrals.
- 2.4** Develop community- and family-informed benchmarks for seamless navigation of the early childhood ecosystem. Invest in resources that help communities ensure their full range of local services meets these benchmarks.
- 2.5** Increase the number of **community-based referral networks** that include both early childhood and health care providers to support stronger cross-sector relationships and to help identify and address social determinants of health.<sup>19</sup>

#### Community-based Referral Networks

These are the systems within a community that help a family access and navigate between the programs they need. They can be a set of electronic applications like IRIS,<sup>20</sup> 1-800-CHILDREN, or a local 211 website. They can also be a more manual process, such as a common referral form or a list of resources with names and phone numbers that a provider uses to help a family find the service they need. Communities may utilize both, with some providers using electronic communication tools with automation built in and others relying on internal knowledge built and tracked over time. Regardless of what system is in place, all help to create a “no wrong door” approach for families and encourage collaboration between services providers. When communities invest in and recruit providers to participate in these networks, families experience better care coordination with warm handoffs, closed loops, and more precise referrals.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of families using, and calls to, 1-800-CHILDREN.
- Percent of Kansas counties covered by a referral network.

## GOAL 3

Measure impact across the full continuum of early childhood services over time and use the data to make changes that reduce disparities and improve outcomes for children.

### Actions

- 3.1** Identify and adopt quality indicators and targets for early childhood services in key outcome areas. Include, among others, metrics on family engagement, healthy development, early childhood literacy, child care licensing, workforce development, maternal/child health, child care quality, home visiting, and family well-being
- 3.2** Integrate cross-sector data using the Kansas Data Trust Authorized Project process<sup>21</sup> to measure progress toward targets.
- 3.3** Establish and implement a statewide quality indicators communication plan that increases transparency, generates more robust data, and supports greater understanding of priorities and impact. Target communications by audience: families, providers, state leaders, and community decision makers.
- 3.4** Optimize existing data dashboards to reflect adopted quality indicators and targets. Support program leaders with monitoring to identify areas needing improvement.
- 3.5** Establish a routine quality improvement cycle for **Child Care Licensing regulations**.
- 3.6** Identify and promote tools and resources for measuring social determinants of health across the continuum of early childhood services.
- 3.7** Establish a simple, statewide process for routinely gathering family experiences during the early childhood years to understand more about ecosystem navigation, quality, and effectiveness.
- 3.8** Identify ways to measure the impact of natural disasters and environmental disruptions on families with young children and use the data to make changes that mitigate risk and reduce vulnerability.
- 3.9** Grow participation in the P20W State Longitudinal Data System<sup>22</sup> by aligning data collection, integrating with the Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust,<sup>23</sup> and promoting it as a rich source of information on the long-term impact of early childhood investments.

#### Child Care Licensing Regulations

These are regulations focused on ensuring the health and safety of all children in licensed child care settings. Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) administers the Child Care Licensing program in accordance with the Child Care Act (K.S.A. 65-501 et seq.). The original law was passed in 1919. Statutes and regulations that apply to licensed child care facilities are intended to protect the health, safety, and well-being of children receiving care away from their home and parents or guardians. Maintaining contemporary regulations through regular reviews is crucial in supporting efforts to increase the availability of safe and affordable child care. National health and safety standards found in resources such as Caring for Our Children serve as a guide for strong policies and practices. KDHE recently completed a comprehensive review of regulations and incorporated significant input and feedback from child care professionals and families. Updated regulations take effect on August 2, 2024.

Kansas Child Care Licensing is primarily funded by the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). Services and supports are provided at the community level by KDHE or through contracts with local agencies.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- Creation of shared quality indicators and performance targets.
- The number of state agencies and partners implementing shared quality indicators.
- Percent of positive family experiences navigating services and programs across the early childhood ecosystem.

## GOAL 4

Promote agreements between public and private sectors to expand early childhood initiatives.

### Actions

- 4.1 Develop a resource hub—using *All In For Kansas Kids* communication channels—of strategies and successful approaches to public-private partnerships in Kansas communities.
- 4.2 Document the necessary resources and policy improvements to scale local partnership models designed to expand family access to child care.
- 4.3 Develop various fiscal approaches to supporting families during the early childhood years. Promote these approaches to the private sector, improving their understanding of diverse regional needs and investment opportunities.
- 4.4 Establish local and/or regional child care partnerships that build on the state-level Go Team efforts<sup>24</sup> to help communities identify solutions to child care challenges.
- 4.5 Publicize family-friendly workplace strategies and resources (paid parental leave, flexible schedules, subsidized child care, etc.) through [allinforkansaskids.org](http://allinforkansaskids.org), governance group communication channels, and working groups that promote employer-driven support for families.
- 4.6 Work with the Kansas Department of Commerce to encourage businesses who receive economic incentives to include plans for addressing the child care needs of their workforce.
- 4.7 Establish a network of standing early childhood coalitions across Kansas by continuing to invest in the **Communities-in-Action model**<sup>25</sup> and similar coalition-building supports.

#### Communities-in-Action Model

This is a program developed and implemented by Child Care Aware of Kansas that helps communities identify solutions to their local child care challenges. These Communities-in-Action (CIA) are coming together in coalitions of all shapes and sizes to better understand the child care landscape in their community, including the needs and preferences of their local families, child care workforce, and business and civic leaders. In the last three years, 36 CIA events with representatives from 72 communities have sprung up across Kansas with many small-scale solutions already in the works, such as those initiated by the Child Care Task Force of Ellis County.

*The Hays Chamber of Commerce started the Child Care Task Force of Ellis County in September of 2021 to address employers' workforce concerns around the lack of child care and the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment results. The task force has an active and diverse membership including economic development and civic leaders, school district partners, and childcare providers. The task force leveraged a CIA workshop to establish relationships with child care providers, solicit investment from local businesses, apply for outside funding, and establish a workforce pool. These efforts are helping expand child care capacity in Hays.*

### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of businesses using the Employer Child Care Tax Credit.<sup>26</sup>
- The number of businesses building child care into their economic development plans when entering incentive negotiations with the state.
- The number of communities with an operating early childhood coalition.
- The number of public-private partnerships shared on the resource hub for communities.

# GOAL 5

Support policies and initiatives that increase capacity, enhance quality, improve access to services, and contribute to economic security for families.

## Actions

- 5.1** Make it easier for families to access federal and state resources that address basic needs.
- 5.2** Foster economic stability and reduce financial strain on working families during the early childhood years by adopting pro-family policies such as **paid family leave** and expanded access to child care assistance.
- 5.3** Increase use of federal child care assistance (subsidy) by both providers and families.
- 5.4** Identify braided funding opportunities and administrative flexibilities within federal guidelines for early childhood supports (e.g. MIECHV,<sup>27</sup> CCDF<sup>28</sup>) to increase capacity and improve access to services.
- 5.5** Analyze administrative policies and contracts governing state-to-local funding to ensure communities have maximum flexibility to allocate resources for their unique local needs.
- 5.6** Maximize use of Medicaid to serve children ages birth to 5 and their families by:
  - identifying covered services that aren't currently being billed to the extent possible,
  - exploring data sharing possibilities to improve outcomes and cost savings,
  - increasing outreach to local providers to improve understanding of Medicaid-eligible services and reimbursement procedures, and
  - approving more two-generational behavioral health approaches.
- 5.7** Explore the potential impact of administrative and policy changes on children and families through scenario planning, cost modeling, and calculator tools.
- 5.8** Develop an emergency response plan that prioritizes financial resources for expecting families and those with young children during periods of natural disasters or environmental disruptions.

### Paid Family Leave

Infant care is some of the most expensive and difficult care to find. Infants require much more time and attention to care for safely, making it difficult for child care providers, particularly home-based providers, to care for them while caring for other children. Exploring supported parental leave for working parents who have recently had a child should be considered when building solutions addressing child care capacity. Parental leave is much less expensive than child care and is a straightforward program to implement. Parental leave is also good for mothers and their babies—giving them time to recover from birth, encouraging breastfeeding, and supporting caregiver attachment and brain development.

Providing support for working caregivers after the birth of a child also creates more capacity in a badly stretched system. Because infants require more care than older children, keeping infants at home with their parents has the potential to create capacity of more than one slot per infant. This direct and indirect effect on capacity makes paid family leave the least expensive way to safely expand child care capacity.

## Progress Tracking Plan

- Decrease in the percentage of Kansas families with young children (or expecting) living in poverty.
- The number of families accessing health insurance.
- Decrease in areas of Kansas considered child care assistance deserts.
- The number of families with access to paid family leave.

## GOAL 6

Strengthen existing tools and create new resources to ensure providers offer families seamless transitions in support of their child’s interests, healthy social-emotional development, and academic potential.

### Actions

- 6.1** Strengthen partnerships between elementary schools and early childhood providers. Identify effective kindergarten transition methodologies across the state and nationally, with a focus on improving support for children living in rural and frontier regions.
- 6.2** Promote inclusive practices and providing accompanying supports so that all children from ages birth to 5 can participate in early childhood programs together, including: children with, or at risk of, developmental delays and children with special health care needs.
- 6.3** Enhance and align data collection and monitoring efforts to identify and address disparities.
- 6.4** Expand uptake of the statewide ASQ Online system<sup>29</sup> among service providers who directly support families with children ages birth to 5 to ensure families get appropriate access to developmental screening and early intervention services.
- 6.5** Increase routine screening, referral practices, and reimbursements—where appropriate—within programs that directly support young children birth to 5. Identify and address geographic gaps in screening services to ensure families in rural areas have equal access.
- 6.6** Recognize the prenatal period as a significant transition and an opportunity to introduce families to services in the continuum of early childhood programs (e.g. WIC, Medicaid services, home visiting, Child Care Assistance, **Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library**).<sup>30</sup>

#### Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library

As of July 2024, over 75,000 children are enrolled. This is roughly 42% of the Total Eligible Population (TEP) of Kansas children birth to 5. This is an increase from 22% (~42,000) in 2021, when Kansas started expanding Imagination Library coverage. The Dollywood Foundation defines full enrollment as 65% of eligible children enrolled. As of July 2024, 12 counties were at or above 65% enrollment with the highest being Comanche County at 92%.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- The Kansas Can Star Recognition (Kindergarten Readiness) rating<sup>31</sup> of school districts partnering with local early childhood care providers to ensure smooth transitions.
- The number of early childhood programs using the state ASQ Online system/Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot participation rate.
- The percent of incoming kindergarten students developmentally “on track” within the state ASQ Online system.
- The number of children/families participating in a home visiting program (including prenatal).
- Percent of eligible families participating in prenatal programs.



## PILLAR 2

# Early Childhood Workforce & Environments

Our workforce is the heartbeat of the Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem. Highly qualified and valued professionals are key to creating the consistent, safe, and high-quality experiences we want for our young children. Shortages in the number of highly qualified early childhood professionals is a particular point of emphasis in this plan, as it has implications for child and family well-being and the Kansas economy at large.

The early childhood workforce encompasses a range of professional fields including child care workers, early educators and administrators, early intervention specialists, and home visitors. We also recognize the importance of ensuring families have access to services traditionally provided by public health and behavioral health professionals. Too many Kansas communities, especially in rural and frontier areas of the state, experience limited availability of obstetricians, pediatricians, early childhood mental health professionals, dentists, dietitians and other health workers. The professionals who provide these services are an important consideration of comprehensive efforts to grow the Kansas early childhood workforce and help rural communities thrive. Goals and actions in this pillar aim to recruit, retain, and elevate high-quality professionals while also enhancing the learning environment of the children they work with.

➤ **When we invest in a high-quality early childhood workforce,<sup>32</sup> it benefits us all through:**



**Increased job satisfaction** and retention among early childhood professionals



**Increased productivity** and economic growth for society



**More families—especially women**—participating in the labor force



**Enhanced family well-being** and overall economic security



**More job stability** and higher incomes for working parents



**Improved child development** and academic outcomes

- **Goal 1** Support strategies to increase the overall compensation of early childhood professionals and improve the financial sustainability of programs.
- **Goal 2** Build workforce capacity to provide high-quality early childhood services.

- **Goal 3** Support early childhood professionals to help them reach their professional development goals.
- **Goal 4** Support high quality programming and resources for expecting families and children in all birth to age 5 environments so they can reach appropriate developmental goals.

# GOAL 1

Support strategies to increase the overall compensation of early childhood professionals and improve the financial sustainability of programs.

## Actions

- 1.1 Produce a comprehensive study of exemplary wage and compensation strategies for early childhood professionals from Kansas communities and other states to inform potential local and state investments.
- 1.2 Establish a compensation ladder with a competitive wage floor and financial incentives to recruit, retain, and support advancement of a diverse early childhood workforce.
- 1.3 Scale promising differential pay programs that aim to increase infant/toddler child care slots.<sup>33</sup>
- 1.4 Expand differential pay strategies to increase the number of professionals providing child care for children with disabilities, developmental delays, or special health care needs and those needing care during non-traditional hours.
- 1.5 Support policies that increase availability of benefit packages (e.g. paid leave, health insurance) for all early childhood professionals.
- 1.6 Ensure a full range of resources are available to support child care owners with business operations, such as budgeting, succession planning, and enrollment management.
- 1.7 Expand use of shared service networks<sup>34</sup> to meet the unique needs of multiple types of child care facilities, including family child care homes and small centers.

## Progress Tracking Plan

- The median salary of early childhood professionals.
- The increase in child care providers accessing shared services and resources for business operations.
- Percent and number of early childhood professionals accessing benefit packages.

## GOAL 2

### Build workforce capacity to provide high-quality early childhood services.

#### Actions

- 2.1** Identify and implement effective models for recruiting new professionals into programs across the full continuum of early childhood services in the ecosystem.
- 2.2** Partner with higher education leaders, including the Kansas Board of Regents, to create additional degree advancement opportunities for the workforce.
- 2.3** Coordinate with the Kansas Department of Commerce to ensure economic development projects are supported in planning for the early childhood needs of working families.
- 2.4** Research and evaluate unique approaches for growing the workforce in rural regions experiencing shortages in services for expecting families and those with young children.
- 2.5** Routinely conduct exit interviews for professionals leaving the early childhood workforce to identify common challenges to remaining in their field and/or position.
- 2.6** Explore ways to reduce the impact of burnout, stress, and/or mental health challenges on the retention and turnover of early childhood professionals.
- 2.7** Ensure all state-funded professional recruitment and retention materials are available in languages other than English to support an increase in the number of professionals representing diverse communities.
- 2.8** Explore initiatives to support newly hired workers to improve onboarding and early career experiences as a retention tactic.
- 2.9** Expand innovative and effective child care initiatives, like the **Small Center Pilot**,<sup>35</sup> to provide more flexible work environments for child care professionals.
- 2.10** Pilot and expand successful approaches to collaborative home visiting funding models that increase the percentage of aid-to-local funding used for direct staffing supports.
- 2.11** Evaluate aid-to-local funding for early childhood services to identify efficiencies that can be re-allocated to increase staffing capacity.
- 2.12** Develop resources for state agencies, partners, and early childhood programs to support contingency plans for operating during or after major disruptions.

#### Small Center Pilot

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) child care licensing team established the Small Center concept in response to the unique child care challenges of rural communities, which often have fewer resources to meet the child care needs of multiple age groups in their communities. Four providers are in the pilot phase (launched early 2024), which is being evaluated from both the provider and family perspective. Providers in the Small Center Pilot can serve up to 24 children with different age groups without the requirement of separate classrooms that come with large center licenses. Pilot facilities partner with KDHE child care licensing to determine the right spacing needs and access points to effectively support a larger group of mixed-age children.

#### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of formal education pathways for early childhood professionals.
- The number of child care facilities opened and closed.
- Percent increase in the number of early childhood professionals in Kansas by geography and by profession.
- Description of reasons early childhood professionals leave the field.

## GOAL 3

### Support early childhood professionals to help them reach their professional development goals.

#### Actions

- 3.1** Execute the Kansas Early Childhood Career Pathway<sup>36</sup> implementation plan, ensuring alignment with competencies and higher education.
- 3.2** Convene a working group to explore and recommend integration and joint professional development opportunities between child care, school-based, and home visiting offerings.
- 3.3** Stand up the Workforce Registry,<sup>37</sup> establish registry governance, and develop a plan for ongoing development and implementation statewide. Ensure equitable access and incentivize adoption.
- 3.4** Create a protocol for developing new training, mentorship, and coaching offerings that aligns with the Kansas Early Childhood Career Pathway and Kansas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals.<sup>38</sup> Use the protocol to ensure professional development programs are of high quality and meet the diverse needs of professionals.
- 3.5** Address gaps in the offerings of linguistically- and diverse-ability-appropriate professional development for the early childhood workforce.
- 3.6** Analyze Workforce Registry data to better understand and adjust for workforce challenges and preferences.
- 3.7** Establish a routine quality improvement process for early childhood professional development offerings. Include feedback from professionals and families with young children, and focus on:
  - easing the process for accessing professional development and getting training approvals,
  - completeness/accuracy of Child Care Core Competencies,
  - effectiveness of professional development promotional efforts, and
  - adequacy of higher-level offerings for professionals with significant tenure in the field.
- 3.8** Increase the number of professional development opportunities that integrate best and/or evidence-based practices into service delivery. Focus on trauma-informed care, maternal and early childhood mental health, behavioral health, special health care needs, and early literacy.
- 3.9** Establish mentorship and coaching offerings to integrate best practices into service delivery and support knowledge transfer.

#### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of child care professionals creating an individualized professional development plan (IPDP).
- The number of early childhood professionals using the workforce registry.
- The number of available trainings and formal education opportunities meeting the needs of early childhood professionals.
- Percent of positive family experiences navigating services and programs across the early childhood ecosystem.

## GOAL 4

Support high quality programming and resources for expecting families and children in all birth to age 5 environments so they can reach appropriate developmental goals.

### Actions

- 4.1** Help early childhood programs upgrade facilities, materials, and curriculum to ensure high-quality environments that meet the needs of all young children, particularly those with special health care needs.
- 4.2** Ensure providers supporting expecting families use effective two-generational screening practices, provide education and awareness of services, and make referrals as appropriate.
- 4.3** Support local networks, such as Local Interagency Coordinating Councils,<sup>39</sup> that champion and increase family and provider access to the statewide ASQ Online system especially in rural areas where availability may be more limited.
- 4.4** Expand Links to Quality<sup>40</sup> statewide to ensure consistent, high-quality, child care environments.
- 4.5** Address gaps in the availability of linguistically- and diverse-ability-appropriate learning materials.
- 4.6** Expand training offerings to ensure professionals can build proficiency in the Kansas Early Learning Standards,<sup>41</sup> the Child Care Core Competencies, and the National Family Support Competency Framework for Family Support Professionals.<sup>42</sup>
- 4.7** Promote and support models that enable young children with disabilities, developmental delays, or special health care needs to realize their full potential while fully participating in settings with their typically developing peers.
- 4.8** Create and distribute planning and training resources for early childhood programs to support mitigation, adaption, and resilience efforts for responding to natural disasters and emergencies.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of child care citations related to a lack of emergency preparedness.
- Percent of children developmentally “on track” within the state ASQ Online system.
- Percent increase in professional development offerings related to meeting special health care needs.
- Amount of funds spent by state agencies to address environmental, material, and curriculum upgrades for providers.
- Percent of children birth to age 5 eligible for early intervention or special education receiving these services in their chosen early childhood setting.<sup>43</sup>



### PILLAR 3

# Experiences of Children & Families

To create the experiences our children need as described in the Blueprint, we must be laser focused on providing all Kansas families high quality, affordable services and resources that meet their needs. Ensuring these needs are met is an ongoing effort that considers the past (what have we learned from research, evaluation, bright spots, and gaps?), the present (what are parents, caregivers, professionals, and communities saying they need and want?), and the future (how can we plan and prepare for our children's future to make sure every child thrives?).

The experiences of children and families also help us gauge the health and agility of the Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem. Meaningful family engagement is foundational. Because the experiences of children and families are influenced by many factors—their demographics, where they live and work, what services and supports they seek—engagement of families from across the state creates vital input for producing better outcomes for all Kansans. Goals and actions in this pillar support learning from lived experiences, co-creating with families, and feedback loops to ensure accountability to family voice and preference. This pillar is equally concerned with helping families access services that fulfill basic needs and support their well-being, no matter where they live and work in Kansas.

➤ **When children experience high-quality early childhood opportunities, they are...**



**23% less likely to be removed**

from the home into foster care.<sup>44</sup>



More likely to develop the cognitive and social-emotional skills that benefit them in school and life.<sup>45</sup>

➤ **Families benefit from high-quality early childhood opportunities because they...**



Enable caregivers to return to or stay at work, pursue education, and become more financially independent.<sup>46</sup>

➤ **Goal 1** Engage families in opportunities to connect and learn while encouraging family input and acting on insights from lived experience.

➤ **Goal 2** Build awareness of the services available to help families make informed decisions in support of their child's interests, healthy development, and learning.

➤ **Goal 3** Improve child well-being by increasing access to the full range of services that prioritize safe, nurturing parent/caregiver relationships and strong families.

➤ **Goal 4** Prioritize the mental health of children and families by offering accessible, multi-generational services and opportunities for connection in supportive environments.

➤ **Goal 5** Ensure families experience respectful and responsive interactions across the full continuum of early childhood services.

# GOAL 1

Engage families in opportunities to connect and learn while encouraging family input and acting on insights from lived experience.

## Actions

- 1.1 Prepare state agencies, coalitions, and workgroups to incorporate family engagement best practices for co-creation, and equip families to meaningfully engage in early childhood initiatives.
- 1.2 Provide connections and resources for family leaders seeking increased advocacy knowledge or leadership training.
- 1.3 Compensate families for participating in learning experiences, collaborations, and leadership activities at the state level.
- 1.4 Pilot targeted strategies for **incorporating family voices in early childhood ecosystem decision making** that minimize the burden on families.
- 1.5 Establish program policies that promote family-led peer groups at the community level to increase social connections and supports for families during the early childhood years.
- 1.6 Look for and celebrate bright spots in communities around co-creating with families.
- 1.7 Create safe spaces and accessible ways for families to share stories of lived experiences. Routinely invite participation and develop reliable methods to act on insights and barriers.
- 1.8 Turn family input and feedback into action and positive change.

### Incorporating Family Voices in Early Childhood Ecosystem Decision Making

The Family First Family Council is a body of 20 community members with lived expertise who coordinate with the Kansas Department for Children and Families to provide oversight and strategic direction on programs supported by Family First funding.<sup>47</sup> The Family Council drives their own agenda as a group, reviews and interprets data, engages in community education, and makes recommendations to federal, state, local, and agency policy. Members also represent their regions on the Kansas Interagency and Community Advisory Board to drive regional decision making from the family perspective.

## Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of parent/caregiver/family members trained to engage in leadership activities in early childhood initiatives.
- The number of state agency requests for proposals (RFPs) requiring plans for family leadership input as a proposal requirement.
- The number of initiatives providing compensation to families engaging in leadership activities.

## GOAL 2

Build awareness of the services available to help families make informed decisions in support of their child’s interests, healthy development, and learning.

### Actions

- 2.1** Distribute information on healthy development and screening within programs that serve expecting families and those with young children, including family resource centers,<sup>48</sup> maternal health providers, and partners in the broader ecosystem (e.g. public play places, physical health settings, elementary schools).
- 2.2** Ensure community-based facilities (e.g. family resource centers, public health facilities) are equipped with information on the programs and resources available to help expecting families and families with young children understand, navigate, and access early childhood services.
- 2.3** Co-create and publicize resources to increase family understanding of healthy development milestones and how to request screening services.
- 2.4** Ensure early childhood ecosystem websites and online resources prioritize family-friendly language and clear information for both expecting families and those with young children.
- 2.5** Co-create artifacts that document the lived and preferred experiences of families as they navigate the services and programs that support children during the prenatal period and early years.
- 2.6** Effectively incorporate community efforts that support pregnant moms and expecting family units into early childhood ecosystem planning and funding decisions, including mental health and poverty-related programs.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of users accessing information from state agency and partner websites (e.g. [allinforkansaskids.org](http://allinforkansaskids.org), Child Care Aware, Help Me Grow, etc.).
- The number of children screened using the state ASQ Online system.

## GOAL 3

Improve child well-being by increasing access to the full range of services that prioritize safe, nurturing parent/caregiver relationships and strong families.

### Actions

- 3.1** Streamline agreements between the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and appropriate entities to support automatic enrollment or referral to eligible services when families sign up for WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). Likewise, support referrals to WIC from other appropriate services.
- 3.2** Study geographic gaps in prevention activities across the continuum of early childhood services, and work to increase well-being supports in rural, high-poverty, and other traditionally underserved areas.
- 3.3** Support models or approaches that prioritize parent-child bonding during situations where parents are receiving substance abuse treatment or involved with the criminal justice system.
- 3.4** Prioritize referrals for families in need of concrete supports to the appropriate resource (e.g. food, shelter, child care, broadband, healthcare, and newborn supports).
- 3.5** Identify and leverage resources, programs, and policies that bolster efforts to create **family-friendly workplaces in Kansas**.
- 3.6** Support the work of the Kansas Fights Addiction initiative,<sup>49</sup> specifically ensuring that the early childhood perspective is incorporated into community solutions and interventions.
- 3.7** Identify and leverage resources, programs, and policies that bolster efforts to increase overall family well-being.

#### Family Friendly Workplaces in Kansas (Family Forward Toolkit)

Family Forward Workplaces is an innovative initiative to improve children's health and well-being and keep Kansas's businesses and workplaces competitive. It is employer-led change to increase access to research-based, family friendly practices—big and small—that improve workplace productivity, recruitment and retention; grow a strong economy; and support children's healthy development. In the Guide to Family Forward Workplaces, you'll find evidence-based guidance on benefits that positively impact child health and well-being and provide a positive return on investment for employers; information about each benefit and its impact; sample policies and case studies from employers who successfully implemented family friendly policies and steps for how to get started when implementing new policies or enhancing existing ones.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- Child and family well-being domains showing improvement.
- Percent of expecting families accessing prenatal care.

## GOAL 4

Prioritize the mental health of children and families by offering accessible, multi-generational services and opportunities for connection in supportive environments.

### Actions

- 4.1** Promote the importance and availability of behavioral health services for parents with information on the connection to early childhood health and well-being. Work to increase access to behavioral health resources by removing financial, social, and physical barriers, especially for families living in rural areas with a lack of available options.
- 4.2** Expand maternal health services and improve outcomes for new parents through initiatives that support their unique needs during the postpartum transition period.
- 4.3** Expand **mandated supporter** training programs to include guidance on responding to substance use concerns during periods of pregnancy and postpartum.
- 4.4** Conduct an environmental scan of available behavioral health services for new and expecting parents, infants, and young children, and identify policies and strategies, such as expanding Medicaid codes, to make these services more widely available and accessible to all.
- 4.5** Train early childhood primary care providers across the state to better recognize and effectively make referrals around parent mental health.
- 4.6** Support holistic recovery of children who have lived through natural disasters by addressing physical and mental health needs.
- 4.7** Identify strategies to address behavioral and mental health care deserts for parents and young children.

#### Mandated Supporter

A mandated supporter refers to an individual who plays a crucial role in maintaining the well-being and safety of children. By providing families with resources such as counseling, financial assistance, and substance abuse treatment, mandated supporters help create a stable and nurturing environment for children. Mandated supporter is a term used in child welfare in place of “mandated reporter” to signal a shift in practice. Mandated reporters are professionals required by law to report suspected child abuse and neglect. While this statutory requirement still applies to those professionals, the term mandated supporter recognizes the dual role of these providers to also deliver support. It also recognizes the role of the community in meeting family needs and preventing crises that can lead to child welfare system involvement. This shift is helping us transition from a system that merely reacts to problematic home situations to a true prevention system. Meeting needs within the community proactively reduces stressors and risk factors within the family, thereby preventing situations that might otherwise lead to crises and the necessity of a mandated report.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- The number of professionals trained to effectively make referrals in support of parent mental health.
- The number of counties considered behavioral healthcare deserts.

## GOAL 5

Ensure families experience respectful and responsive interactions across the full continuum of early childhood services.

### Actions

- 5.1** Train early childhood professionals to better understand and identify ways to provide linguistically- and diverse-ability-appropriate experiences.
- 5.2** Increase access to multi-lingual translation and education services for children ages birth to 5 and their families.
- 5.3** Communicate in ways that are responsive to the unique needs and preferences of children and families and that help build trust between professionals and families. Work with families to understand and leverage existing trustworthy resources in the community.
- 5.4** Develop multi-lingual and easily understandable parent education materials and resources for all birth to 5 services and settings.
- 5.5** Connect children and families to needed services by partnering with community mutual-aid networks and faith-based organizations. Consider ways these and other partnerships can facilitate social interaction/ connection for families and early childhood professionals experiencing isolation or disconnection.

### Progress Tracking Plan

- Percent of families reporting positive attitudes and experiences with early childhood services.
- The number of bilingual or multi-lingual early childhood professionals.
- Demographic characteristics of families receiving early childhood services and the professionals providing services.





# Pathways to Action

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This is a five-year plan with roles and responsibilities for early childhood champions at both the state and local levels. Families and caregivers, policymakers, business and community leaders, service organizations, and the professionals caring for Kansas children are equally critical for ensuring we reach our goals. There are many ways to get involved and take action.

- Local Pathways
- State Pathways
- Funding Pathways
- Accountability Pathways

# Local Pathways

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Within communities, there's a range of teams, workgroups, coalitions, and committees from both state agencies and local organizations that have subject-matter expertise and the resources to implement this plan's goals and actions. Early childhood champions are at work in communities across the state, addressing challenges and advocating for our youngest Kansans. Examples of local entities are detailed below, including the unique focus area of each group. Getting involved in these local efforts—or starting your own initiative if you have gaps in your community—is an immediate pathway to action. Reach out to service providers in your community to connect or visit [allforkansaskids.org](https://allforkansaskids.org) for more ideas on how to get involved.

## Community-led Child Care Coalitions

These coalitions are usually formed with the purpose of addressing child care capacity within their communities as well as working towards quality childcare and smooth kindergarten transitions. For a list of some of these local coalitions, please visit: [ks.childcareaware.org/childcare-coalitions](https://ks.childcareaware.org/childcare-coalitions).

## Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICCs)

LICCs are made up of community members with a vested interest in system improvement of services for children birth to 5 and their families. LICCs are responsible for many things, from screening and identification services to communication and collaboration among community partners on issues pertinent to the population they represent. For more information on LICCs please visit: [kansasicc.ksde.org/local-icc/licc-contact](https://kansasicc.ksde.org/local-icc/licc-contact).

## Family Resource Centers (FRCs)

Family resource centers are community or school-based drop-in centers located in a variety of settings including schools, libraries, community centers, housing complexes, and faith-based buildings. They offer a safe, strength-based setting for family-oriented on-site programs, resources, activities, and classes designed to strengthen families. FRCs provide multiple services for diverse families and children that help increase protective factors and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

## Parent Engagement Groups

Parent engagement groups, like Head Start Policy Councils, are comprised of parents and community members who lead and help make decisions about the programs they are involved in to help ensure programs are providing appropriate services for their families. To become involved in these efforts inquire with your direct service provider to see if they hold parent or client engagement groups.

## Local LiveWell or Healthy Community Groups

These groups generally strive to improve health and preventative services in their communities as well as educate community members about how to live a healthy lifestyle. For more information about some of the local healthy community groups please visit: [bcbsks.com/blue-health-initiatives/pathways/grantees](https://bcbsks.com/blue-health-initiatives/pathways/grantees).

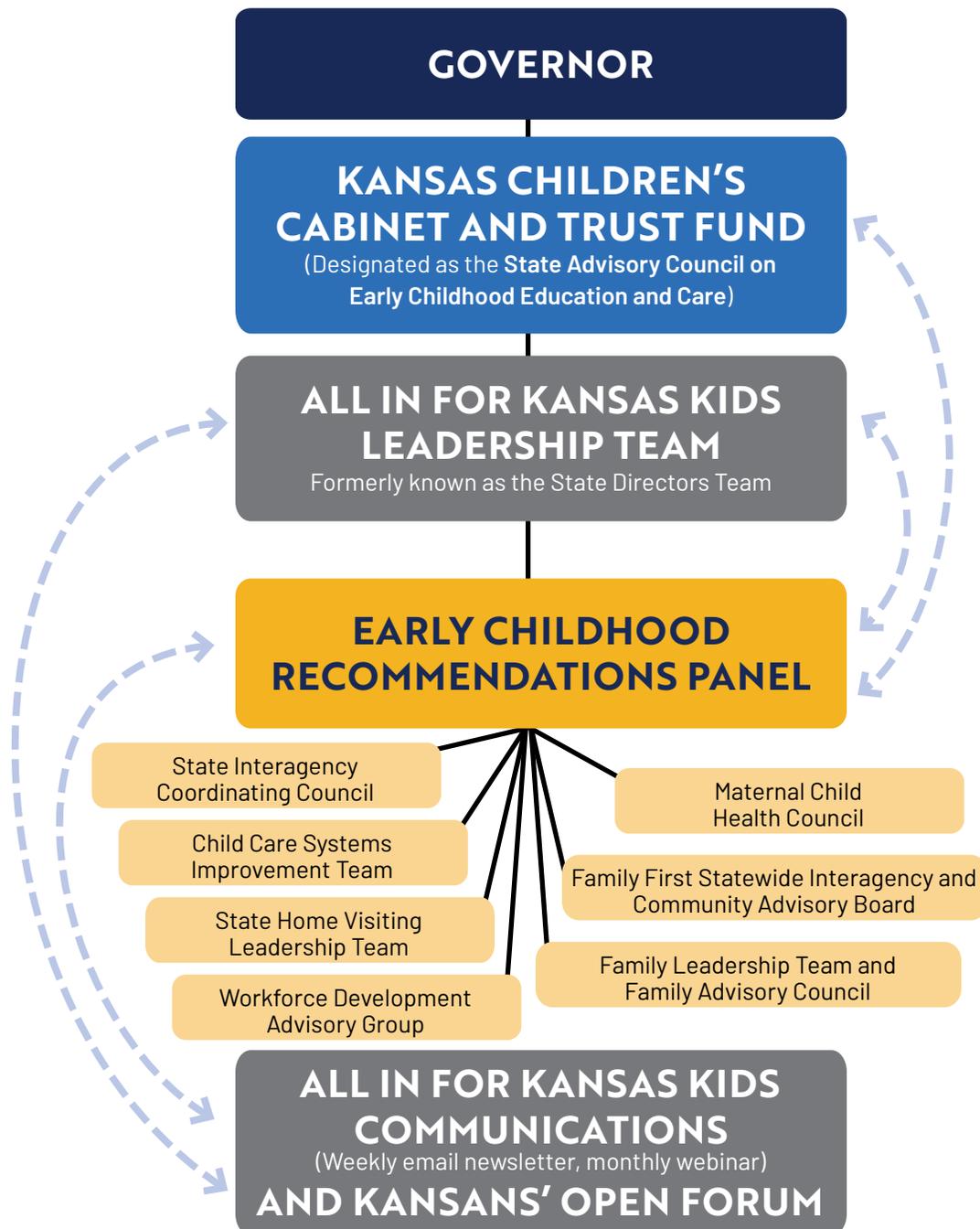
## Kansas Perinatal Community Collaborative (KPCC)

This model brings together public health and clinical care services to assure continuous and coordinated care for pregnant people and their families. For more information please visit: [kdhe.ks.gov/549/Perinatal-Community-Collaborative](https://kdhe.ks.gov/549/Perinatal-Community-Collaborative).

# State Pathways

The Kansas Early Childhood Governance structure creates space for Kansans to have discussions, elevate ideas, and work together to take action toward goals. The various groups within this structure and their focus areas are detailed below. Each group holds routine meetings (most of them are live streamed for public viewing) and offers opportunities to collaborate across experiences and communities. Learning more about these groups, attending any public meetings, or even applying to formally join the membership are all pathways to action.

## Kansas Early Childhood Governance Structure



### **Early Childhood Recommendations Panel**

- Working group of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet in its role as Kansas Early Childhood Advisory Council<sup>50</sup>
- Made up of key program and state agency staff and parents, as defined in executive order
- Identifies and responds to challenges across the ECE ecosystem
- Utilizes a working group structure to tackle Strategic Plan actions
- Strengthens connections and awareness between community- and state-level efforts

### **Maternal Child Health Council**

- Advisory group to KDHE Title V/Maternal Child Health programs (prenatal to age 18)
- Made up of state partners, local public health entities, community-based organizations, medical professionals, and families
- Elevates maternal health needs of Kansans and offers ideas for improving outcomes

### **Home Visiting Leadership Group**

- Made up of state Home Visiting (HV) administrators (MIECHV, Family First, etc.) and program leads from the different HV models, including Parents as Teachers, Head Start, and Healthy Families America
- Reviews HV needs assessment and outcomes data, and recommends improvements to HV practices, competencies, and policies
- Looks for ways to align HV services across models to better meet family needs

### **Family Leadership Team**

- Made up of parents and caregivers, and state agency staff leading family engagement initiatives
- Provides guidance on family engagement and outreach policies and practices
- Ensure family voices are included in state-level decision making

### **Family Advisory Council**

- Made up of families and caregivers with diverse lived experiences, including children with special health care needs
- Ensures family perspectives are included in KDHE Title V family and child health program efforts, including planning, evaluation, service delivery, and policy development

### **Child Care Systems Improvement Team**

- Made up of state agency staff, state partners, and community leaders involved in child care policy, licensing, workforce supports, and capacity building
- Reviews and recommends quality improvement efforts for KDHE Child Care Licensing, including on regulations, resources and toolkits, and communications

### **State Interagency Coordinating Council**

- Provides guidance and recommendations to state agencies on services for children birth to age 5 with, or at risk of, developmental delays or disabilities
- Membership established in federal law and state statute<sup>51</sup>

### **Family First Statewide Interagency and Community Advisory Board**

- Supports implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act and work of the Kansas Strong collaboration
- Made up of state agency staff, court system representatives, parents, and youth leaders
- Works to create meaningful and lasting change for the Kansas child welfare system

### **Workforce Development Advisory Group**

- Ensures a coordinated and comprehensive approach to early childhood workforce development in Kansas
- Represents multiple state and local agencies/ organizations working on development of workforce core competencies, conducting annual needs assessments, and creating a process for individualized professional development plans

# Funding Pathways

Achieving the vision of every child thrives—and meeting the goals of this strategic plan—requires significant, consistent resources and broad-based support from both public and private sources. The spotlight on early childhood in recent years has made it clear that understanding how early childhood services are currently funded is an important starting point for securing additional investments. Kansas funds its early childhood ecosystem through a combination of local, state, and federal sources.

## Federal Sources

### *Administered by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment*

- Maternal Child Health (MCH)
- Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

### *Administered by the Department for Children and Families*

- Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)
- Family First Preservation Services (FFPSA)
- Head Start and Early Head Start
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

As referenced earlier, for 25 years Kansas has dedicated its Tobacco Master Settlement funds toward meeting the needs of our next generation. The resulting Children’s Initiatives Fund ensures that roughly \$50 million each year is directed exclusively toward Kansas-specific early childhood efforts with flexibility to meet evolving and unique community needs. The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem has also benefited from short-term federal grant funding over the past few years. These sources include the Preschool Development Birth-5 grant (2019-2024), and one-time pandemic relief funding at federal, state, and local levels (2020-2026).

Locally, both individual families and entire communities have been contributing to early childhood services and supports for decades. Family fees for child care services represent a significant source of funds. Philanthropic organizations have long been generously supporting an array of early childhood programs, and private business investments are on the rise, particularly for child care. Communities continue to champion early childhood funding, demonstrating commitment through bond issues and other public-driven local efforts.

Currently, the early childhood ecosystem is funded through a patchwork of sources that are largely insufficient in covering the true costs of high-quality, accessible care and education. We must continue to draw from existing sustainable sources, but to meet the goals of this plan, we also need new, consistent, long-term funding. Pathways to action for increased early childhood funding include leveraging flexibility in federal funding to maximize impact, establishing or strengthening private sector partnerships, and enhancing strategic, state-level investments.

# Accountability Pathways

The goals in the plan are written broadly, identifying ways to “operationalize” the Blueprint Building Blocks—ensuring healthy development, strong families, and early learning. The actions supporting goals in this plan are just a start. They are meant to grow and change with new ideas and signs of progress. Tactical plans and timelines, as they are produced by champions of this plan, may either be phased, happening concurrently, or dependent on other actions to happen first. Certain actions may hinge on decisions made by local or state government. The Kansas Early Childhood Governance structure helps ensure all of us stay connected and informed of changes and progress that influence the entire ecosystem and the work happening in service of this plan’s goals and actions.

To keep this plan a “living document,” the **All In For Kansas Kids Leadership Team** will:

- Engage agency leaders, equip and empower employees to take action toward goals, and align agency resources and actions in service of this plan.
- Assess progress on goals regularly to course correct as needed and to share both lessons learned and bright spots with families and communities statewide.
- Prepare regular updates for review and action by Early Childhood Governance groups, and use *All In For Kansas Kids* communication channels to share information and opportunities for action more broadly.
- Analyze this plan’s metrics and our state’s needs assessments to determine progress and impact, and to adjust the plan as needed to reach goals.





# Conclusion

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The Kansas early childhood ecosystem is working collaboratively more than ever before, and the resilient professionals providing care and education for our youngest Kansans are being acknowledged more and more for the skilled work they do—despite, on average, earning well below a living wage. Reflecting on the original **2020 All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan**, we can appreciate just how far we’ve come in a few short, tumultuous years. The public conversation around early childhood is robust and nuanced, and we now benefit from many more early childhood champions at work in communities and across multiple sectors of our economy. Local efforts are more innovative than ever, and Kansans are leading the way—not just here at home, but nationally as well—in changing how we support the well-being of children and families, expand child care capacity, and use futures thinking to anticipate tomorrow’s challenges and solutions.

Yet there is still much work to do. We are more informed, committed, and stronger in number than ever, but 212,462 young Kansans and their families continue to rely on all of us to propel momentum forward. The **2024 All In For Kansas Kids Needs Assessment** revealed the challenges—new and persisting—that we must overcome, and this strategic plan describes the many pathways to action we can take to see meaningful change.

We must continue to take advantage of this moment to ensure that every child thrives. This is not a vision or a challenge for any one organization or state agency alone. It is an invitation to join in the ongoing work of giving all children in Kansas—and their families—the very best start. An invitation to look far into the future to anticipate how to best meet tomorrow’s needs today—to become **All In For Kansas Kids**.

## OUR VISION

### Every Child Thrives

All children will have their basic needs met and have equitable access to quality early childhood care and education opportunities, so they are prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

### We are on a journey toward a Kansas in which...



Children and families thrive in caring and connected communities.



High-quality early childhood programs and services are accessible and available.



The early childhood workforce is valued and respected.



Our resources and investments align with our vision.

# Contributions

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Thank you to all who contributed their insights and ideas to the **2024 All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan** through feedback sessions and our online form, including the following groups:

- Child Care Providers Coalition of Kansas
- Communities in Action
- Family Advisory Council
- Family First Interagency and Community Advisory Board
- Family Leadership Team
- Governor's Public Health Conference
- Kansas Department of Health and Environment
- Kansas Division of Early Childhood
- Kansas Home Visiting
- Part C Coordinators
- Early Childhood Recommendations Panel
- State Interagency Coordinating Council
- Workforce Development Advisory Group

Your voices are vital for ensuring goals and actions reflect what is needed to help every child thrive in Kansas.

## GET CONNECTED

You too can be an active contributor to this plan via the website where you will find regular updates on progress toward our collective goals as well as opportunities to contribute ideas and experiences on this shared journey toward ensuring every child thrives.

[allinforkansaskids.org](https://allinforkansaskids.org)

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Center on the Developing Child (2007). The Science of Early Childhood Development (InBrief). Retrieved from [developingchild.harvard.edu](https://developingchild.harvard.edu).
- 2 The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study reports that 70% of children in high-quality early education programs were rated as well-prepared for kindergarten, compared to 50% of their peers in lower-quality programs. The NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development shows that children participating in early childhood programs were 30% more likely than control groups to achieve higher scores in reading and math in elementary school.
- 3 Participation in early childhood programs reduces the likelihood of needing special education services later in life. The Abecedarian Project demonstrated a 48% reduction in special education placements among participants. Graduates of a high-quality early childhood program in Kansas—The Opportunity Project—were 36% less likely than their peers to need special education services throughout their schooling.
- 4 The HighScope Perry preschool experiment reveals that individuals who participated in the program have a 65% high school graduation rate compared to 45% for non-participants. Children who participated in the Chicago Longitudinal Study had a high school completion rate of 71.4%, compared to 54.5% for those who did not participate.
- 5 The Abecedarian Project has shown that individuals who received high-quality early childhood education were less likely to engage in criminal activity as adults. Participants in the project had significantly lower rates of misdemeanor and felony arrests. The HighScope Perry preschool experiment shows that children who attended high-quality early learning programs had 19% lower arrest rates and 70% fewer arrests for a violent crime than similar children who did not participate.
- 6 Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. (2023). Distinct count of children data dashboard. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/ecids-dashboard/>
- 7 All In For Kansas Kids. (2020a). 2019 needs assessment. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/all-in-for-kansas-kids/needs-assessment/>
- 8 All In For Kansas Kids. (2020b). Early childhood strategic plan. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/project/2020-strategic-plan/>
- 9 The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG) is a federal competitive grant program through the Administration for Children and Families. Grants are distributed to states and territories to support early childhood services for children birth to age five. Funds support efforts to conduct needs assessments, develop strategic plans, engage families, improve quality, and address workforce compensation and supports. PDG grants support improved collaboration among early childhood programs and the broader ecosystem. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/early-learning/preschool-development-grants>
- 10 All In For Kansas Kids. (2024). 2024 Needs Assessment. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/project/2024-needs-assessment/>
- 11 The Blueprint for Early Childhood (Blueprint) originated in 2014 and incorporated several cross sector efforts to build a Kansas early childhood system. The current Blueprint, updated in July 2024, adds the voices of over 6,100 Kansans and aligns efforts of the Cabinet and other state agencies. Partnering agencies include the Kansas Department for Children and Families, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and the Kansas State Department of Education. Methods for ensuring a solid foundation in early childhood are presented in the Blueprint and organized into three building blocks: Healthy Development, Strong Families, and Early Learning. The Blueprint recognizes the early years as a critical period for intervention that establishes a child's foundation for school and life success. The document provides common language, a shared vision, and guidance for cross-sector collaboration in the delivery of high-quality programs and services. Together, the Blueprint and the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan align the activities of agencies and providers in our state's ecosystem around common goals.
- 12 *All In For Kansas Kids (All In)* is the official strategic plan and package of comprehensive early childhood initiatives aimed at optimizing our state's early childhood ecosystem to help ensure every child thrives. The *All In* initiative is led by a group of state agency directors responsible for various aspects of early child and family services. Collaboration among state agencies, local communities, providers, educators, and families through *All In* is key for realizing a more cohesive and effective system.
- 13 The Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel (Panel) is the working group of the Kansas Early Childhood Advisory Council. The Panel plays a key role in enabling our state to implement the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan, respond to challenges, elevate recommendations from communities, and make decisions that help us achieve the vision of every child thriving.
- 14 The Child Care Systems Improvement Team (CCSIT) is an advisory group to KDHE that focuses on child care licensing. CCSIT membership includes leaders from across the state and early childhood care and education system.
- 15 The Workforce Development Advisory Group (WDAG) is comprised of subject matter experts who review and recommend best practices, tools, and processes for the early childhood workforce in Kansas. The goal is to strengthen professional development, core competencies, and infrastructure to empower the workforce.

- 16 Nobel prize winning professor of economics, James Heckman, found that starting earlier achieves greater economic and social gains. Professor Heckman's latest research presents "The Heckman Equation," demonstrating that high-quality birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment—a rate substantially higher than the 7-10% return previously established for preschool programs serving 3- to 4-year-olds.
- 17 Professor Heckman's latest research on the Perry Preschoolers at midlife finds multi-generation gains for the participants and children of participants in the areas of education, health, employment and civic life. The research provides a compelling indication that early childhood education can be an effective way to break the cycle of poverty.
- 18 1-800-CHILDREN, powered by the Kansas Children's Service League (KCSL), serves as a statewide call line and resource directory. 1-800-CHILDREN addresses parenting questions, judgment-free, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by phone, app, website, and email. [1800childrenks.org](https://1800childrenks.org)
- 19 Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. SDOH can be grouped into five domains: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.  
<https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>
- 20 IRIS is an online bi-directional referral tool that streamlines communications between community providers offering services to individuals and families. IRIS helps partners identify available resources, make referrals, and monitor whether families receive the help they choose. The IRIS approach guides communities to facilitate that change themselves. Commitment, collaboration, and accountability shape the change and generate successful connections for families.
- 21 Kansas Data Trust Authorized Projects are projects that have been documented, reviewed, and approved to be executed by the Kansas Data Trust. To be approved, projects must include at least two data sets from two different agencies and there must be a data sharing agreement in place that outlines the purpose, data security measures, and data elements to be shared.
- 22 The P20W State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) is a statewide database that collects, validates, and connects information from early childhood through K-12 education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. The SLDS provides valuable cross-sector data insights critical for evaluating programs and informing policy decisions that positively impact children and families.
- 23 The Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust represents a group of agencies that provide services to young children and their families who seek to integrate data from their agency with data from other agencies to evaluate the needs of the early childhood system. <https://kschildrenscabinet.org/data-trust>
- 24 The Child Care Go Team (CCGT) mobilizes local, regional, and state resources to address community-specific needs/barriers to building child care capacity. Specific services include identification of community assets, resources, and funding; child care solution design; navigation of state and local licensing/building regulations; subsidy enrollment support for families; and connection to quality enhancements and best practices for child care.
- 25 Communities In Action workshops offer a "one-stop" experience for community teams looking to address child care capacity concerns. Each workshop provides opportunities for community teams to learn from early childhood experts, receive customized child care supply/demand data, identify and develop short- and long-term goals during structured planning time with an expert community coach, and receive a child care capacity toolkit.
- 26 The Kansas Child Day Care Assistance Tax Credit helps employers cover some of the costs associated with providing child care services to their employees. A business that provides these services is entitled to a tax credit against their income tax liability.
- 27 The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) is a federal grant opportunity that supports home visiting for expectant and new parents with children up to kindergarten-entry age who live in communities that are at-risk for poor maternal and child health outcomes. Families voluntarily participate in home visiting programs and partner with health, social service, and child development professionals to set and achieve goals that improve health and well-being. The program builds upon decades of research showing that home visits during pregnancy and early childhood improve the lives of children and families. Home visiting helps prevent child abuse and neglect, supports positive parenting, improves maternal and child health, and promotes child development and school readiness. The MIECHV Program is administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration in partnership with the Administration for Children and Families.
- 28 The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) is the largest federal funding for states to help low-income families afford child care. CCDF provides families with child care assistance; assists with quality improvement, skill-building, and professional development for the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce; and provides consumer education to help parents select child care that meets their needs. Every state administers Child Care and Development Block Grant, with the lead agency for CCDF designated by the Governor. The Kansas Department for Children and Families is the Kansas CCDF lead agency.

- 29 ASQ Online system: Through the All In For Kansas Kids initiative Kansas provides statewide access to the Ages & Stages Questionnaires® (ASQ) Online. The Statewide ASQ Online System makes it easier for organizations to serve families through developmental screening. By participating in developmental screening, providers of all kinds can assess a child’s development, address any potential concerns, and connect families to services and supports in their community. All Kansas elementary schools are required to partner with families to better understand incoming kindergarten students’ development using this tool. The ASQ Online is also available to any community partner serving children ages zero to five.
- 30 The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children—better known as the WIC program—serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health care.
- Medicaid is a state–federal partnership jointly funded by states and federal government to assist with providing medical care to eligible people. Within broad federal guidelines, each state establishes its own eligibility standards; determines the type, amount, duration, and scope of services; sets the rate of payment for services; and administers its own program. Broadly, there are four major eligibility groups covered by most states: children, adults with disabilities, aged adults, and nondisabled adults.
- Home visiting supports the healthy development and well-being of children and families. While each home visiting model is unique, in general, home visiting involves three main intervention activities conducted through one-on-one interactions between home visitors and families: assessing family needs, educating and supporting parents, and referring families to needed services in the community. Early childhood home visiting programs aim to improve a wide range of outcomes including maternal health, child health and development, child maltreatment prevention, and family economic self-sufficiency.
- Child Care Assistance, also known as child care subsidy, is available for qualifying families who need help paying for child care costs. The Kansas Department for Children and Families’ Child Care Assistance Program supports working families who meet initial income eligibility requirements, families participating in qualified education or training, teen parents completing high school or their GED, and families who receive Cash Assistance (TANF) taking part in work programs.
- Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is open to any Kansas child from birth to their 5th birthday. Children receive free, age-appropriate books mailed directly to their home every month to help nurture a love for reading and enrich their lives.
- 31 The Kansans Can Star Recognition program recognizes communities that offer quality, inclusive opportunities to young children and their families so that each student enters kindergarten at age 5 socially, emotionally and academically prepared for success. <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Fiscal-and-Administrative-Services/Communications-and-Recognition-Programs/Vision-Kansans-Can/Kansans-Can-Star-Recognition/Qualitative-Measures/Kindergarten-Readiness>
- 32 Devercelli, A. E., & Beaton-Day, F. (2020, December). Better Jobs and Brighter Futures: Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital. WorldBank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a5e7a52e-115c-5dd1-97e6-c1b062c945c9/content>
- 33 For example, the Baby Steps initiative is an innovative pilot that seeks not only to offset the revenue lost by caring for infants and toddlers, but also to bring family child care providers’ incomes closer to what might be considered a “livable” wage. In addition to financial incentives, participating child care programs also receive support from the Kansas’ Infant Toddler Specialist Network and other programs working to improve the quality of care for young children.
- 34 Shared service networks, or hubs, are designed to help groups of child care programs reduce costs, improve the strength of management, and enhance quality of services by sharing administrative functions with other organizations that provide the same types of services. By participating in a Shared Service Network, child care providers benefit from services that cost less – and that are often more efficient – than what the programs could do on their own. These entities are often based locally, serving a network of providers in the same community or region.
- 35 The Small Center Pilot is a new approach to space and staffing under the “child care center” license type which KDHE is piloting for mixed-age care settings.
- 36 The Kansas Early Childhood Career Pathway represents the career, support, and training options available to early childhood professionals. This tool recognizes the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences for children, families, communities, and the state. The career pathway guides professionals in the field towards resources and opportunities to support their professional goals. <https://allforkansaskids.org/career-pathway/>
- 37 The Workforce Registry is a platform that integrates access to training opportunities and supports, professional development resources, and personal management tools into a single online source. The Workforce Registry supports early childhood professionals by creating a standard framework for organizing goals, credentials, and degree opportunities.
- 38 The Kansas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Education Professionals outlines the knowledge and skills required for adults to deliver high-quality early care and education to children, birth to age 8.

- 39 Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICCs) are comprised of community members with a vested interest in system improvement of services for children birth to five and their families. LICCs are responsible for many things, from child find activities, to communication and collaboration among community partners on issues pertinent to the population they represent. The state of Kansas Administration Regulation 28-4-565 states that “Each community shall have a local interagency coordinating council (LICC) that has as one of its purposes, the coordination of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.”  
<https://kansasicc.ksde.org/local-icc/licc-contact>
- 40 A Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is an approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care settings. In Kansas, our QRIS is called Links to Quality and is led by the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF). Providers can earn Quality Recognition Links to demonstrate the quality of their care and highlight strengths in the areas of Program Leadership, Family Partnerships, and Learning and Development.
- 41 The Kansas Early Learning Standards (KELS) guide early childhood providers and teachers on the developmental continuum of learning for children from birth through kindergarten, i.e. what young children should know and be able to do as a result of engagement with caring knowledgeable adults, evidence-based curriculum, and developmentally appropriate activities.
- 42 The National Family Support Competency Framework is a model of skills shared by all family support professionals (FSPs), from family support workers to nurse home visitors to parent educators. FSPs work in a range of program models, such as Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and local programs.  
[institute.fsp.org](http://institute.fsp.org)
- 43 Examples: Indicator 6A or Indicator 5A data collected by the state; evaluation data from programs aimed at providing early intervention or early childhood special education and related services in a child’s least restrictive or natural environments.
- 44 University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research. (2022, January 1). Reducing foster care removals. Prepared and presented by the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research on behalf of the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund.  
<https://kschildrenscabinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ROI-for-Kansas-Early-Childhood-2022.pdf>.
- 45 Schoch, A. D., Gerson, C. S., Halle, T., & Bredeson, M. (2023, August). Children’s learning and development benefits from high-quality early care and education: A summary of the evidence (OPRE Report No. 2023-226). The Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/%232023-226%20Benefits%20from%20ECE%20Highlight%20508.pdf>.
- 46 Hartley, R. P., Chaudry, A., Boteach, M., Mitchell, E., & Menefee, K. (2021). A lifetime’s worth of benefits: The effects of affordable, high-quality child care on family income, the gender earnings gap, and women’s retirement security. National Women’s Law Center & Center on Poverty and Social Policy.  
<https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/A-Lifetimes-Worth-of-Benefits-Compliant.pdf>.
- 47 The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) was signed into law as part of Public Law (P.L.) 115-123 and has several provisions to enhance support services for families to help children remain at home, reduce the unnecessary use of congregate care, and build the capacity of communities to support children and families. The law enables states and territories to use funds for prevention services, such as , evidence-based mental health programs, substance abuse prevention and treatment, in-home parent skill-based programs, and kinship navigator programs. Kansas also invests state general funds into the Family First initiative.
- 48 Family resource centers are community or school-based drop-in centers located in a variety of settings including schools, libraries, community centers, housing complexes, and faith-based buildings. They offer a safe, strength-based setting for family-oriented on-site programs, resources, activities, and classes designed to strengthen families. FRCs provide multiple services for diverse families and children that help increase protective factors and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.
- 49 In 2021, the Kansas Legislature passed the Kansas Fights Addiction Act, authorizing the state to use money recovered by the Attorney General’s Office through settlements to tackle substance use disorders (SUD) and help ensure prevention and treatment services are provided throughout the state. The Kansas Fights Addiction Initiative is conducting a needs assessment that will provide an in-depth view of the state’s SUD system across the lifespan and including all sectors, from early childhood and prevention through treatment and long-term recovery.
- 50 In early 2020, the governor designated the Children’s Cabinet as the Kansas Early Childhood Advisory Council. Public Law 134-110 outlines the role, duties, and designee representation for State Advisory Councils (SACs). SACs are designed to ensure statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs and services in the state, including child care, Head Start, IDEA preschool and infants/family programs, and pre-kindergarten programs and services.
- 51 State Interagency Coordinating Council: Created in both state and federal law (K.S.A. 74-801 and Public Law 105-17), the Council’s role is to advise and assist in the delivery of services to preschool children (birth through age 5) with special needs.



**All In For**   
**Kansas Kids**

[kschildrenscabinet.org](https://kschildrenscabinet.org)