



Kansas Early Childhood System

Needs Assessment



Acknowledgments

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Letter from Kansas Early Childhood State Directors Team

February 2024

In 2019, our comprehensive needs assessment identified that families' experiences are significantly impacted by where they live, and too many Kansas children grow up in families and communities where basic needs are not met. These central messages combined with key findings around workforce, infrastructure, and systems alignment shaped the focus areas of the Kansas *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan, which offered a shared vision and strategic approach to addressing the needs of families with young children. Even through an unprecedented pandemic, the commitment of Kansans to prioritize early childhood remained strong.

We have made significant progress since 2019. Improvements in our data infrastructure and expanded resources to support professionals and communities showcase system-level improvements. Young children and their families also benefited from additional resources. The statewide expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, increased universal home visiting services, and expanded eligibility for Child Care Assistance represent a few of these efforts.

We begin 2024 with optimism and excitement. Early childhood is a stated priority for public officials, businesses, and community leaders alike. Over 500 Kansans – parents, elected officials, business and community leaders, and early childhood professionals – engaged in Listening Sessions over the summer. They reiterated the importance of a thriving early childhood ecosystem to meet family, employer, and community needs, and indicated support for the emerging trend of locally-driven, public-private partnerships.

Yet the data also reveal ongoing challenges. Child care deserts persist, with communities and employers searching for solutions to leverage the momentum of the state's record-breaking economic growth. Low wages and burnout hamper an already stretched early childhood workforce. Every state is having similar issues, and Kansas will need to address them in the years ahead.

Another challenge is that Kansas families continue to experience a fragmented system slow to respond to their evolving needs. The Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force recommended the state address this challenge by unifying its governance of early childhood, allowing the state to more effectively address the issues raised by partners in the needs assessment process.

With that in mind, we proudly present our comprehensive 2024 Needs Assessment. This report provides an introduction to the current Kansas early childhood landscape and a detailed account of our methods and data sources. We then dive deeper into the Kansas early childhood ecosystem, followed by sections on the needs of the early childhood workforce, and young children and their families. The final section presents a snapshot of our progress over the past five years and opportunities to meet the pressing needs of today while preparing for a vibrant future. This Needs Assessment will drive updates to the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan to chart our course for the next five years.

Ad astra, per aspera.

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Executive Summary

Findings from decades of scientific research underscore the importance of high-quality early childhood programs, services, and experiences for children's brain development and success throughout the life course. In Kansas, we are working to streamline the system of early childhood to efficiently prioritize child and family well-being across a range of programs and services. This Needs Assessment highlights the areas of greatest need for the early childhood ecosystem, workforce, and the children and families they serve. Although we note numerous recent successes and accomplishments, our primary focus is to articulate the needs that remain and require attention.

We analyzed numerous local, state, and national reports (refer to [Table A.1](#) in the appendix) to understand the early childhood ecosystem and experiences of Kansas children, families, and professionals, triangulating data whenever possible. The Needs Assessment presents distinct findings across three main sections: the Kansas early childhood Ecosystem, the Kansas early childhood Workforce, and Experiences of Children and Families. The following is a summary of significant findings for each section:

The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem

Despite progress in collaboration on many fronts, fragmentation is a core barrier to delivering services to children and families. A coordinated governance structure has improved collaboration among state agencies, enhancing efficiency and access to services. Challenges persist due to fiscal and regulatory differences and a lack of clear lines

of decision-making authority, resulting in a disconnected and often unresponsive system for children and families. Navigating diverse requirements across different timelines inhibits local leaders from creatively blending funding streams through public-private partnerships. The implementation of authorized projects under the Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust for data-based decision-making shows promise, but partners express a desire for more flexible data sharing to fully analyze the impact of investments, highlighting the persistent challenge of navigating multiple layers of data sharing requirements.

The Kansas Early Childhood Workforce

Highly qualified professionals are key to safety, quality, and system sustainability within the early childhood ecosystem and Kansas' economy at large. Integrated initiatives are underway to recruit, retain, and elevate these professionals, yet concerns persist about workforce sustainability due to low wages and inadequate benefits. While statewide strategies have supported child care administrators in maintaining services during workforce shortages, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the long-term sustainability of many programs remains uncertain without a stable funding infrastructure.

Experiences of Children and Families

The mission articulated in the *All In for Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan is to build a solid foundation for Kansas children and families. Kansas is actively addressing individual child and family needs through services aimed at improving family functioning, promoting mental health, and facilitating employment. However, persistent barriers, such as inadequate health care, inflexible job opportunities, and low wages, prevent many families from meeting their basic needs and thriving. Additionally, geographical considerations influence the availability, accessibility, and affordability of early childhood programs and services, as well as basic needs. Ensuring sustainable futures for the youngest Kansans requires meeting their basic needs and providing them with access to a responsive system.

Findings



Fiscal and regulatory differences and a lack of clear lines of decision-making authority are barriers to delivering services to children and families.



The need to navigate multiple requirements and timelines inhibits local leaders and public-private partnerships from maximizing resources.



Multiple layers of data sharing requirements prevent a full analysis of the impact of investments.



Low wages and inadequate benefits are core challenges to recruiting and retaining early childhood professionals in the workforce.



The long-term sustainability of many programs families rely on remains uncertain without stable funding.



Inadequate family access to basic needs blunts the effectiveness of early childhood services.



Geographic location shapes access, affordability, and availability of early childhood services.



Introduction

The responsibility for ensuring that all Kansas children have the best possible start in life belongs to every one of us – at the individual, family, and community levels – and is rooted in the science of early childhood development. Findings from decades of scientific research underscore the importance of high-quality early childhood programs, services, and experiences. These findings represent a call to action for each of us to be *All In For Kansas Kids*.

About the Needs Assessment

We are at a critical, yet hopeful juncture in our early childhood ecosystem. COVID-19 caused significant disruptions for children and families resulting in both acute and long-term impacts. Though systemic barriers have long been embedded within the Kansas early childhood ecosystem, the pandemic brought these barriers to the forefront. The Kansas early childhood ecosystem experienced ripples of interrupted routines, missed intervention points, an increasingly overwhelmed workforce, losses in the quality and frequency of early learning experiences, and fewer opportunities for children and families to thrive.

For children, families, and the workforce, the long history of systemic barriers in the early childhood ecosystem was well documented in our comprehensive 2019 Needs Assessment. The added impact of the pandemic was captured in our Needs Assessment Updates in 2020 and 2021. Across all of our research, we have documented that families experience challenges due to the lack of available, accessible, and affordable high-quality early childhood services provided by highly qualified professionals who are adequately and sustainably compensated. Additionally, we have identified that families and professionals experience barriers navigating the early childhood ecosystem, such as

when families are trying to connect to services they need and when professionals are trying to establish or advance services and programs. Now is the time to reassess, strategize, and detail our collective commitment to this work on behalf of all Kansas children and their families.

For this year's Needs Assessment, we examined the realities, challenges, and successes of the current early childhood ecosystem with a broad array of partners. We analyzed numerous local, state, and national reports (see [Table A.1](#) in the appendix) detailing realities and needs across all sectors. The data painted a picture of both the resilience of Kansans and persistent struggles faced by many families and professionals. Although we will discuss some of the many successes and accomplishments across our ecosystem throughout this Needs Assessment, our primary aim in this report is to articulate the greatest areas of need for the early childhood ecosystem, workforce, and children and families whom they serve. [Key Term Definitions](#) can be found in the Appendix.

All components of the Needs Assessment process included quantitative and qualitative data to generate insights and rich understandings of the themes within and across Kansas communities. Population-level data from Kansas vital records and the [U.S. Census \(2022\)](#) provided demographic and population trends, and data were utilized from the state's [Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard](#). Whenever possible, we triangulated data to better understand the early childhood ecosystem and experiences of Kansas children and families within this landscape.

The Needs Assessment Team at the [University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research \(KU-CPPR\)](#) led data collection, analysis, and synthesis. The team worked collaboratively across the early childhood ecosystem to ensure a complete picture of experiences and needs of children and families in Kansas. Additionally, KU-CPPR worked closely with the Kansas Early Childhood State Directors Team throughout this process.

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Where We Have Been

The comprehensive 2019 Needs Assessment initiated our recent understanding of the state of early childhood in Kansas, and demonstrated that Kansans value children's early years. The report highlighted bright spots, ripples of innovation, and historical progress, along with substantial gaps and areas of need across Kansas early childhood services and supports. Bright spots were identified in the efficient, innovative, and responsive efforts put forward by early childhood partners in communities throughout the state. Ripples of innovation included local efforts to consolidate and integrate services. However, a substantial gap was identified between the supply of and demand for high-quality early childhood programs and services. Therefore, areas of need included removing barriers for families by improving program availability and accessibility, streamlining service coordination, and focusing efforts to cultivate and sustain early childhood workforce, facilities, and infrastructure in Kansas.

The 2019 Needs Assessment offered a snapshot of where we were then, identified possibilities for system improvements, and unlocked a collective vision of an early childhood ecosystem in which all Kansas children and families can thrive. Findings from the 2019 Needs Assessment directly shaped the development of the five-year *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan (2020b). In 2020 and 2021, we provided annual Needs Assessment Updates to update data snapshots, document progress, understand setbacks, and collaboratively adjust strategies and tactics to ensure continued momentum toward a streamlined, high-quality early childhood system for all Kansas children and their families.

Kansas Early Childhood Programs and Services for Children and Families





Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five

In January 2019, Kansas was awarded an initial Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) planning grant, resulting in a comprehensive, statewide needs assessment and strategic plan. These were built collaboratively with multiple state agencies, each with the designated authority for specific early childhood services and programs. Prior to this effort, there had not been a unified space in Kansas where systems-level collaboration and decision-making among these agencies occurred.

The 2019 Needs Assessment highlighted inconsistent access to services for young children across the state and emphasized that many families in Kansas struggle to meet their basic needs. Findings from the needs assessment led to development of the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan to improve early childhood programs and services, organized by seven goal areas:

- State-level collaboration
- Community-level collaboration
- Family knowledge and choice
- Private sector collaboration
- Capacity and access
- Workforce
- Quality and environments

In May of 2020, Kansas was awarded a PDG B-5 renewal grant which, over the past three years, has provided funding and served as a catalyst to implement *All In For Kansas Kids*. Publication of the strategic plan coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Governor Laura Kelly recognized the importance of the grant to Kansas, noting that, “This grant is particularly welcome now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an additional degree of stress on early childhood in Kansas. With it, we will continue to fight for the health and safety of children and families in our state.”

Over the past three years, PDG B-5 funding has supported various system-building efforts across the state to, among other initiatives:

- enhance access to child care
- engage families and ensure family knowledge and choice
- strengthen workforce development
- improve the quality of early childhood services

Importantly, resources were equitably provided to rural communities that often encounter unique barriers to accessing services and supports.

Impact of COVID-19 and the Early Childhood System's Response

As we lived through unpredictable and often overwhelming challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw how gaps in accessibility and availability of early childhood services grew wider and even more urgent (Stanford Center on Early Childhood, 2022). Data presented in the 2020 Needs Assessment Update showed evidence of widening disparities in Kansas. While there were signs of system recovery toward the latter half of 2020, the recovery itself was not uniform, and some populations were more likely to be left behind. For example, children of color continued to be more impacted by poverty, as did children from urban and densely settled rural areas (Kansas Action for Children, 2020). Data collected in 2020 also showed that Hispanic/Latino and Black families, low-income families, and families who work non-traditional hours were more likely to experience barriers accessing affordable, high-quality child care in proximity to where they lived and worked (KDHE & KU-CPPR, 2021).

The pandemic slowed *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan implementation efforts, but as state agencies worked to create emergency relief programs, this plan provided a framework for decision-making that guided our state's crisis response. Throughout 2020, we maintained a proactive approach to support a Kansas future while we worked to address the critical and immediate needs of children, families, early childhood professionals, and organizations.

The 2021 Needs Assessment Update revealed encouraging signs of recovery in Kansas:

- poverty rates declined
- unemployment rates and public preschool enrollment approached pre-pandemic levels
- families benefited from the expanded Child Tax Credit, among other relief efforts.

However, several challenges remained: insufficient wages for the early childhood workforce, child care deserts, and access to services. The 2021 Update reiterated aspects of the early childhood ecosystem that must be improved to ensure a sustainable and high-quality system in Kansas. The need for comprehensive system improvements requires that we address root causes of these challenges to ensure that every child thrives, which remains the mandate of the *All In For Kansas Kids* work.

The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem

In Kansas, we are working to streamline the complex ecosystem of early childhood—we are shifting away from a system made up of siloed state agencies and moving toward an integrated ecosystem that efficiently prioritizes child and family well-being across a range of programs and services. When we speak of early childhood in Kansas, we describe an ecosystem focused on young children and their families, which includes high-quality child care, evidence-based and universal home visiting programs, Part C early intervention services for eligible children ages birth to three-years old and their families, maternal and child health services, preschool programs, and Part B early childhood special education services for children three- to five-years old. This early childhood ecosystem also focuses on supports that families may need, such as prevention and intervention, health care, behavioral health, and economic and employment supports.



Our vision is to ensure that all Kansas children and families have universal access to services and supports in a coordinated, high-quality early childhood ecosystem. This is no small task, nor is it a one-time effort. *All In For Kansas Kids* is a journey led by the State Directors Team, comprised of leaders from four state-level groups:



Our Vision
Every Child Thrives

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

The purpose of the State Directors Team is to streamline decision-making, provide clear direction, track benchmarks and progress, generate pathways for statewide collaboration, ensure consistent communication and messaging, anticipate challenges, and develop solutions. The State Directors Team keeps the findings of each Needs Assessment top of mind. By focusing on changes in population demographics, investments, and policies that affect children and families, state leaders can expect and communicate both positive and negative influences on the system. Rather than acting after the fact, Kansas is poised to be anticipatory and proactive in the coordination of efforts across partners.

In addition to leading the Preschool Development Grant Birth through 5 activities, the [Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund](#) (Kansas Children's Cabinet) is charged with coordination across state agencies of initiatives that improve the health, well-being, and educational outcomes of Kansas children, per [K.S.A. 38-1901](#). Kansas Children's Cabinet membership consists of five voting members appointed by the governor, four voting members appointed by legislative leadership, and six ex-officio members. The Kansas Children's Cabinet is designated as the [Kansas Early Childhood Advisory Council](#) through Governor Kelly's Executive Order No. 20-02. Together, the Kansas Children's Cabinet and State Directors Team serve as central touchpoints for the broad ecosystem in Kansas that includes many related—yet distinct—sectors of early childhood care, education, and service provision.

There are significant challenges to developing a coordinated, high-quality early childhood ecosystem. Kansas currently ranks 49th in the country for efficiency and effectiveness in operating an early childhood system (Walsh et al., 2023). Our fragmented system results in duplication of administrative effort at the state level and a maze of services for families and professionals to navigate (Hunt Institute, 2023c). To address these challenges, the first action of Governor Kelly's second term in January 2023 was [Executive Order 23-01](#) to establish an Early Childhood Transition Task Force (Task Force) to explore a "framework for a model single-agency governance structure for early childhood programming that consolidates initiatives and funding under the leadership of a new cabinet-level position." Recommendations from the Task Force were provided to and accepted by Governor Kelly in December 2023 (Hunt Institute, 2023b). More details about the timeline and development of these recommendations can be found at the end of the [Ecosystem Section on page 19](#).

Methods

This year's Needs Assessment is divided into three focus areas that are critical to understanding early childhood in Kansas:

- the early childhood ecosystem
- the early childhood workforce
- the experiences of children and families.

For each of these sections, our investigation was guided by questions derived from the findings of previous Needs Assessments and from goals and strategies articulated in the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. They are:

Early Childhood Ecosystem

- How have relationships among state agencies and organizations influenced policy alignment and improved ecosystem efficiency? What challenges or needs persist?
- How are families and professionals connected to the right services at the right time? What is needed to maximize these efforts?
- How are data shared across agencies and used to better understand the impact of early childhood investments? What are the next steps for fully implementing the Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust?

The Early Childhood Workforce

- How effective are efforts to recruit and retain highly qualified child care professionals in Kansas? What strategies are being implemented to recruit, train, and retain highly qualified early childhood professionals? What challenges still exist for growing and strengthening the workforce?
- How is Kansas implementing high-quality, competency-based professional development? What are the gaps or barriers for professionals to access and participate in professional development opportunities?

Experiences of Children and Families

- How are families getting information about their child's growth, development, and well-being? What gaps exist in a family's access to information that can inform decision-making about services? How is family voice leveraged in decision-making about family programs, services, and practices and how can family voice continue to be leveraged?
- What challenges persist for families when trying to meet their basic needs? What are barriers to accessing early childhood programs and services?
- What needs do communities encounter when trying to provide high quality early childhood programs and services?

The Needs Assessment Team, under the direction of the State Directors Team, utilized data at local, state, and national levels to illustrate experiences of children, families, early childhood professionals, and communities, both as an integral part of, and impacted by, the early childhood ecosystem in the state. Data collection and analysis were iterative processes that began in January 2023 and continued into December. Data were integrated as they became available and were synthesized into key findings.

Methods Process



REVIEW & ANALYSIS

Examine existing Needs Assessments and other pertinent reports.



INPUT

Collection of perspectives from various audiences who are part of the early childhood system including child care professionals, families, and other system partners.



DATA SYNTHESIS

Identifying trends, barriers, gaps, and opportunities by cross-walking findings from a range of data sources and analytic approaches.



Review & Analysis

In the first component of this comprehensive approach, we reviewed and analyzed existing Needs Assessments and other pertinent reports (see [Table A.1](#) in the appendix). We collected a range of reports across the early childhood ecosystem. An initial list was compiled during January and February 2023 and shared with the State Directors Team to ensure that all relevant reports were included. Gathered information was analyzed to identify key themes and trends in three overarching categories: infrastructure of the early childhood ecosystem, the early childhood workforce, and experiences and needs of children and families. We also sought to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic may have created opportunities to build and enhance resilience in the early childhood ecosystem by examining types of supports that helped facilities remain open, or reopen if closed, during the pandemic.



Input

Next, we collected perspectives from diverse ecosystem partners and participants. Rich sources of information included minutes from groups within the formal early childhood governance system and from the Spring 2023 Summit in which representatives from all governance groups discussed their efforts over the past year. Information was also collected through several community engagement efforts happening in support of the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. Some efforts were explicitly planned as part of the Needs Assessment process but, in many instances, the Needs Assessment Team capitalized on opportunities to gather valuable knowledge from other strategic efforts already in place. Here are a few examples of engagement efforts:

- **Developmental health survey and engagement sessions with families.** In the late Fall of 2022, a total of 1,479 Kansas family members and early childhood professionals participated in a survey about developmental screening and available resources for developmental health. Results informed and guided six virtual family engagement sessions in the Spring of 2023 (five in English, one in Spanish) where parents and caregivers were asked to generate ideas for immediate, actionable solutions to improve developmental health experiences of Kansas families.

- **Engagement sessions with early childhood professionals.** Early childhood professionals provided feedback on professional learning opportunities and pathways for growth and advancement across several engagement sessions in 2022 and 2023. Input gathered across almost 20 feedback sessions with early childhood professionals and members of professional organizations like the Early Childhood Higher-Education Options (ECHO) Consortium, Early Childhood Quality Instructional Partners (EQIP), and the Child Care Provider Coalition of Kansas informed the development of the Career Pathway for Kansas Early Childhood Care and Education Professionals (the Pathway). This information was used to ensure that the Pathway will be accessible and affordable to meet the needs of a diverse early childhood workforce, and improve the state's ability to recruit and retain early childhood professionals. The Professional Development Implementation Team (PDIT) reviewed input and finalized the tool.

In partnership with the Kansas Children's Cabinet, DCF, KDHE, and KSDE, Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO) has been leading the implementation of the Career Pathway since April 2023 and hosted 17 virtual listening sessions during August and September 2023 across the state to inform planning and implementation activities. Input on barriers and needs regarding Career Pathway implementation was gathered from over 46 early childhood professionals in 21 counties across Kansas. Seven of the 17 virtual listening sessions targeted groups that train and support the early childhood workforce. These sessions included professionals from Child Care Aware of Kansas (CCA-KS), trainers and technical assistance providers from KCCTO and Infant Toddler Services Network (ITSN); Workforce Development Advisory Group (WFDAG) members, KDHE child care specialists, and faculty from Kansas community colleges, technical institutes, and 4-year universities. Information from these sessions informed the revision of the Career Pathway Implementation Plan, Comprehensive Workforce Study, and helped to operationalize the Career Pathway and supporting materials.

- **Interviews with child care administrators** who were forced to close child care facilities at least once during the pandemic. Administrators, both those who did and did not reopen their facilities, were interviewed to identify challenges brought on—or made worse—by the pandemic and resources and supports that were instrumental for facilities that reopened.
- **Sensemaking in Kansas.** In summer 2023, 214 stories—experiences of thriving or just surviving—were collected from Kansans via Centiment's (n.d.) network of respondents. Unlike most crowdsourcing platforms, Centiment gives respondents the option to direct their compensation to charities of choice; this promotes honest, thoughtful engagement with survey content, yielding high quality data. Recruitment efforts prioritized people whose annual household incomes were \$35,000 or less, and who had children under age 6 in the household. Collecting data through Centiment was an innovative way of engaging the state's population to learn from families whom other engagement methods may not have reached and to address wide-spread survey fatigue. The 'Prevention Framework' used for this initiative is the result of a collaboration across several states to improve outcomes for children and families by gathering insights into bridges and barriers that families encounter.
- **Young Families' Experiences of Social Connection** was a study supported by the Preschool Development Grant designed to understand the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of parents of young children as they relate to social connectedness and support. Researchers at KU-CPPR fielded a survey with a sample of 1,062 Kansans using panel data.
- **Statewide community engagement tour led by the Task Force.** Governor Kelly signed Executive Order 23-01 in early 2023, which charged the Task Force with conducting a series of partner "engagement opportunities to elicit feedback on the current early childhood governance structure and better understand the needs of parents, families, [early childhood professionals], and businesses." The community engagement tour took place in June 2023 with public listening sessions in nine locations across Kansas, as well as an online listening session. Over 500 Kansans provided feedback on their experiences navigating the early childhood ecosystem.

Participants were prompted with three questions:

What challenges, gaps, or barriers have you faced navigating the early childhood ecosystem? What are the greatest needs your family and community face?

What services and programs are working well locally? What innovation is occurring in your community that could serve as a model in other communities?

How well is the state providing support to the early childhood needs of your family and community?

KU-CPPR processed notes generated from engagement efforts to inform the work of the Task Force, as well as this needs assessment. A thematic analysis of session notes was conducted by extracting patterns from feedback collected at each location and comparing them across geographic regions. The findings were published in a white paper (KU-CPPR, 2023a).

The graphic below highlights some of these engagement efforts. [Table A.2](#) in the appendix summarizes in more detail the various engagement efforts whose outcomes contributed to the development of this Needs Assessment.

Engagement Event	Participants	Voices
Maternal and Child Health/ Home Visiting Community Readiness Survey	Expectant parents and caregivers of children	580
Governor’s ECTTF Listening Sessions	Community members	500+
Developmental Health Survey	Family members and early childhood professionals	1,500
Young Families’ Experiences of Social Connection Survey	Participants largely represented Kansas demographics; Kansas parents of young children and families residing in rural areas were overrepresented in the sample	1,062
Our Tomorrows – Sensemaking	Low income individuals with annual household incomes \$35,000 or less	214
Child Care Provider Experience Mapping	Child care professionals	400+



Data Synthesis

Third, we synthesized all compiled information, identifying trends, barriers, gaps, and opportunities by cross-walking findings from a range of data sources and analytic approaches. This synthesis led to a summary of Key Findings, which were shared with the Recommendations Panel. Key Findings are presented in the remaining sections of this Needs Assessment report.

Limitations

Despite the range of information incorporated into this Needs Assessment, which included data and reports from state and national entities, the Needs Assessment Team encountered limitations that prevented some of the proposed work and analyses from being carried out. For example, we proposed to survey early childhood professionals about the challenges they encounter in their work, but decided against this to avoid duplication and survey fatigue on professionals as a comprehensive early childhood workforce study was initiated in November 2023 by KCCTO and the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation at Kansas State University. We suggested utilizing data from the new Kansas Workforce Registry

to assess needs related to early childhood workforce recruitment, training, and professional development across regions, but were unable to do so because the Workforce Registry is still in development. We also proposed statistical analyses, including multivariate regression analysis, using data from the Distinct Count of Children in Early Care and Education Services project to determine gaps and outcomes at the county/regional level, but individual-level data needed to carry out those analyses were not available. Additionally, our assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on licensed facility closures was limited by low participation in the interview study.



Framework

In each Needs Assessment update, we shared new information and data related to the two Central Messages and eight Key Findings identified in the 2019 Needs Assessment. The central messages from the 2019 Needs Assessment articulated how geography and unmet basic needs created interrelated challenges for children, families, and communities. These central messages remain prominent in the 2024 Needs Assessment.

Central Message 1

Families' experiences are profoundly shaped by where they live across the state and within communities. Geography impacts the availability and accessibility of early care and education services and supports, creating isolation and navigation barriers.

Central Message 2

Too many young Kansas children grow up in families where basic needs are not met. The struggle to meet basic needs, such as housing and health care, prevents families from fully meeting their child's developmental needs.

Key Findings from the 2019 Needs Assessment

Eight Key Findings from the 2019 Needs Assessment characterized how Kansas children, families, communities, and professionals experienced early childhood services and supports. For the 2024 Needs Assessment, we analyzed new data and compared these findings to the 2019 Needs Assessment. Additionally, we used guiding questions, which are presented at the beginning of the next three sections, to ensure that our analysis reflected the goals set forth in the five-year *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. Together, these served as a framework that guided our approach to develop the 2024 Needs Assessment Findings. As a result, the 2019 Needs Assessment Findings served as a baseline from which we could describe progress, identify ongoing and new challenges, and document remaining gaps here in the 2024 Needs Assessment Findings.



Accessibility Families with young children experience inequitable access to high-quality programs and services across the broader early childhood system



Availability Families with young children experience a gap between the services that are available and their actual needs, disproportionately affecting vulnerable and underserved populations.



Navigation Families must adopt a "connect the dots" approach to navigate services across sectors; disruptors are frequent and common.



Workforce Early childhood workforce needs at both the leadership and direct service levels include preparation, compensation/financial relief, ongoing training and support, and recruitment and retention.



Facilities Needs exist related to the physical conditions and environments of early childhood facilities across the state



Collaboration Early childhood professionals and partners share a desire for collaboration and cooperation, but these efforts are often disconnected and uncoordinated.



Systems Alignment Greater systems alignment is needed to fully realize an efficient and robust early childhood infrastructure.



Bright Spots Efficient, innovative, and responsive efforts are occurring among early childhood system partners in communities throughout the state.

Key Findings from the 2024 Needs Assessment

Coordinated Governance Structure. Collaboration across state agencies and organizations has increased, creating greater efficiency and increased access to services. Inherent limitations remain in a coordinated governance model, including fiscal and regulatory differences across agencies, and a lack of 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.

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 navigate constraints.

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.

Workforce Development. Integrated initiatives are being launched to recruit, retain, and elevate highly qualified early childhood professionals. Despite these efforts, early childhood professionals question how long they can remain in the field because of low wages and lack of benefits.

Affordable Child Care. Statewide strategies helped child care administrators keep their doors open despite workforce shortages, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. For many programs, future sustainability without a long-term funding infrastructure is questionable.

Basic Needs are Fundamental. Kansas implements services and supports to address individual child and family needs, such as parent education, mental health services, and job training. However, many families cannot thrive because they cannot access the basics, such as housing, health care, transportation, employment, and livable wages.

When Kansas families lack concrete supports and social connections, their children may miss critical opportunities to thrive and grow to their full potential. Children and families can benefit from a seamless early childhood ecosystem that serves as the foundation for thriving and sustainable futures. This moment requires us to rethink how services are designed and delivered from multiple lenses: **access, family needs and preferences, and ease of navigation, to name a few.**



Important Accomplishments

The *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan goals described the infrastructure needed to achieve a vision for children and families in Kansas. Below are important accomplishments that mark progress toward addressing needs identified in the Kansas early childhood ecosystem, experienced by the early childhood workforce, and endured by Kansas children and families.

➤ **Early Childhood Ecosystem**

Improved collaboration across state agencies through state directors team; formation/enhancement of collaborative networks at several intersections of the ecosystem; pandemic relief and recovery efforts.

➤ **Early Childhood Workforce**

Actions aimed at workforce development to unify and professionalize the workforce, such as creating a Workforce Registry, building a Career Pathway, and adopting new Core Competencies.

➤ **Children and Families**

Improved navigation for families and greater access to key services and supports, such as 1-800-CHILDREN centralized access point, developmental screenings, and statewide expansion of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library.

Looking ahead, in the [Ecosystem Section](#), we describe successes and challenges associated with collaboration and alignment, connecting the dots for families, professionals, and communities, and integrating data across the early childhood ecosystem. In the [Workforce Section](#), we turn our attention to the early childhood workforce within this ecosystem, focusing on how and where significant resources are needed to recruit and retain highly qualified professionals. In the [Children and Families Section](#), we detail experiences of children and families across the state, describe their needs, and present data on gaps in services and supports that impact their ability to thrive. And finally in the [Opportunities and Next Steps Section](#), we share a gap analysis and identify opportunities to address persistent needs across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem. Each of the following sections includes a data snapshot of accomplishments and gaps, narrative responses to guiding questions, and recommendations that correspond with each finding.



The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem

Introduction and Guiding Questions

In April 2020, Kansas began implementing the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan to address needs identified through extensive community and partner engagement. Many strategies outlined in the plan focus on collaboration between state agencies and community partners to coordinate services so that all families and professionals in the early childhood ecosystem can access supports when they need them. In the following section, we highlight accomplishments and describe challenges that persist despite notable progress toward the state's goals for a fully aligned early childhood ecosystem. The following questions guided this section of the Needs Assessment:

How have relationships among state agencies and organizations influenced policy alignment and improved ecosystem efficiency? What challenges or needs persist?

How are families and professionals connected to the right services at the right time? What is needed to maximize these efforts?

How are data shared across agencies and used to better understand the impact of early childhood investments? What are the next steps for fully implementing the Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust?

Ecosystem Accomplishments

EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITION TASK FORCE

416
survey
participants



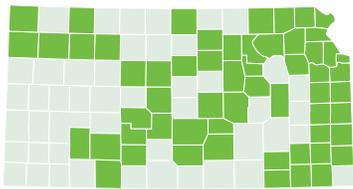
A majority of participants indicated that **Kansas is heading in the right direction**

KU-CPPR, 2023a

COMMUNITIES IN ACTION WORKSHOPS CCA-KS & DCF

26 community
coalitions

Coalitions representing **57 counties** have developed community-driven plans to address child care. Many were well-positioned to apply for and effectively use Child Care Capacity Building Grants.



Child Care Capacity Building Grants
in the amount of

\$2,360,935

were received by **66 child care coalitions** to support local-level planning and implementation efforts to provide affordable, high-quality child care.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In 2022-2023, **265 of 286 Kansas school districts** operated approved **Preschool-Aged At-Risk programs** to serve eligible children. *Kansas State Department of Education, 2023b*



2022-2023

COMMUNITY FUNDING

Kansas state agencies and organizations collaborated to distribute funding to communities through COVID-19 relief allocations, PDG B-5 Quality Subgrants, and the Child Care Capacity Accelerator program.

\$400 million+

in COVID-19 relief funds were distributed to support families, child care professionals and programs, and to make general ecosystem improvements.



\$58,817,713

*Community match for child care
(specifically for Child Care Capacity Accelerator projects)*

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Throughout Kansas, for every new dollar invested in child care professionals, other professionals earn an additional \$0.50-\$0.51.

Green, 2021

Child care professionals earnings

Other professionals earnings



Ecosystem Gaps

CHILD CARE DEFICITS IN KANSAS

Child care has more expenditures than revenue.
Annual average deficits:



\$255,130,586
within the Kansas child care system

\$92,600

per medium center-based
programs serving ~ 70 children



\$3,372
per child served

KU-CPPR, 2022c

CHILD CARE ECONOMIC EFFECTS

The estimated **long-term economic impact of insufficient child care capacity** in Kansas is a

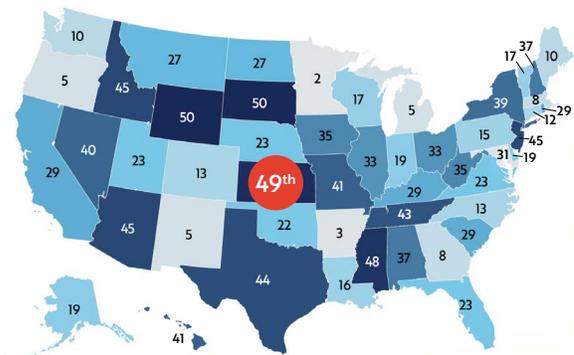
\$2.2 billion to \$3.3 billion loss



Bipartisan Policy Center, 2021

EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

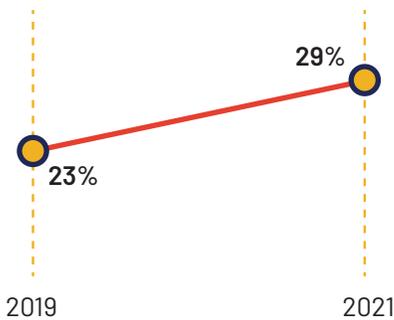
Kansas ranks **49th**
for effective and efficient
early childhood systems integration.



Walsh et al., 2023

EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES

Percentage of children exiting Part C services
without Part B eligibility determinations



No eligibility determination process was implemented for 28.7% of children who exited Part C early intervention services, therefore their eligibility for Part B early childhood special education services was unknown. This percentage is even higher than the 22.9% of children whose eligibility was unknown during the same transition point two years prior.

KU-CPPR, 2019, 2022

PRENATAL & POSTPARTUM SUPPORT

Prenatal and postpartum support
needs to improve in Kansas.



Statewide,
families do not receive paid family leave time.

There are **no statewide group prenatal care or doula programs.**



PN3, 2023

Ecosystem Summary Findings

Findings related to the Kansas early childhood ecosystem were developed through in-depth review of existing data and relevant reports (see [Introduction Section](#)), collection of perspectives from across the ecosystem, and data synthesis of these important, yet distinct insights.

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 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.**

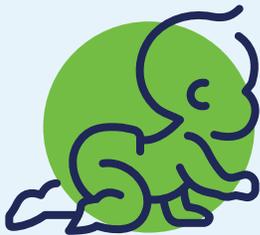


The Current Early Childhood Ecosystem in Kansas

In January 2019, Kansas demonstrated a need and strong desire to support young children and their families and was awarded an initial Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) planning grant, federally funded through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The PDG B-5 grant program supports state efforts to create an aligned and coordinated early childhood ecosystem. The initial PDG B-5 grant in Kansas resulted in the development and publication of a comprehensive, statewide Needs Assessment of the early childhood ecosystem and young children and their families who this ecosystem supports. The 2019 Needs Assessment highlighted that children and families across Kansas have inconsistent access to early childhood services and emphasized that many Kansas families struggle to meet their basic needs. These findings led to the development of the five-year *All in for Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan to improve our early childhood ecosystem.

We learned from the 2019 Needs Assessment that “greater systems alignment is needed to fully realize an efficient and robust early childhood infrastructure” (p. 7). In response to this identified need, the State Directors Team made important strides toward a fully integrated early childhood ecosystem by strengthening the existing governance structure, outlined in the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. In addition, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund (Kansas Children’s Cabinet) introduced a revised Blueprint for Early Childhood to guide state and local decision-making across the ecosystem in ways that promote healthy development, strong families, and early learning. These three “building blocks” are the foundation for collaborative partnerships across all sectors of the early childhood ecosystem, with multiple champions working together to provide high-quality, accessible, and affordable services for children and families.

Blueprint for Early Childhood *Foundational Building Blocks*



Healthy Development



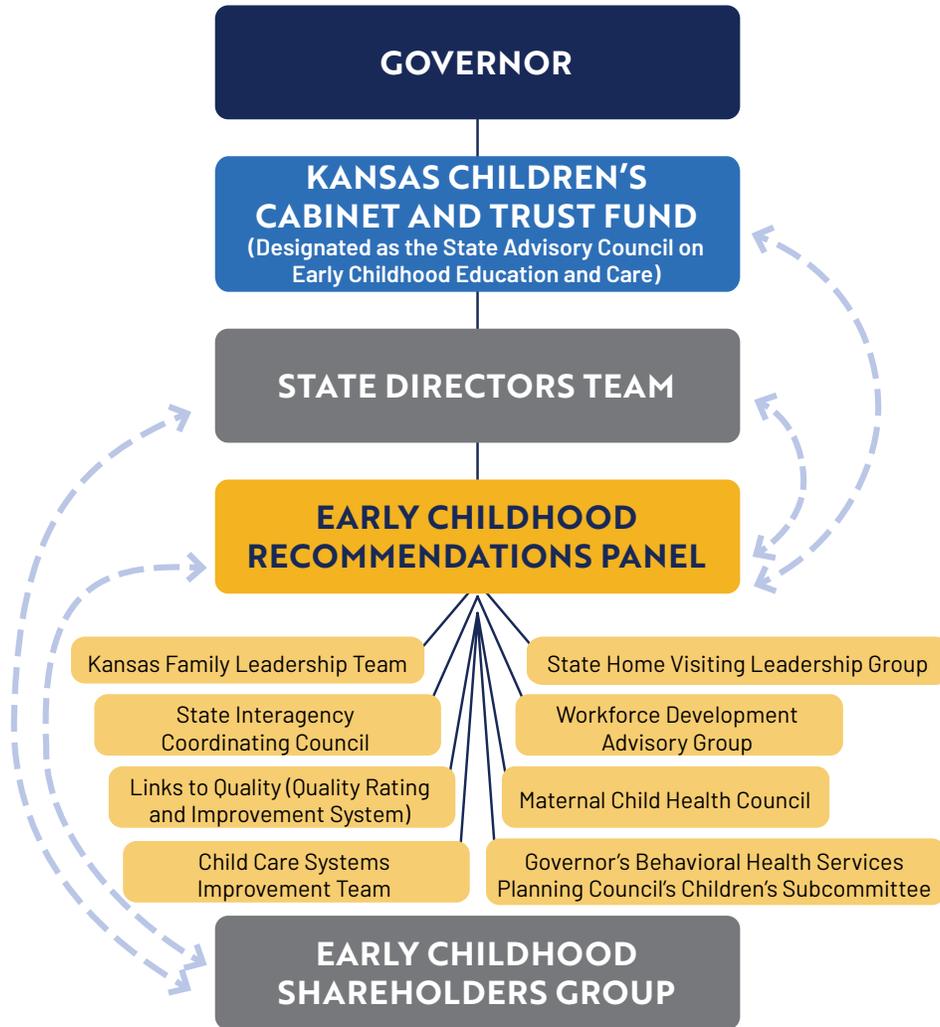
Strong Families



Early Learning

The governance structure calls for agency collaboration through two central touchpoints: the Kansas Children’s Cabinet, which meets every two months, and State Directors Team, which meets every two weeks. Beyond these collaborative meetings, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and State Directors Team continuously coordinate with groups and councils representing all sectors of the Kansas early childhood ecosystem. For example, the State Directors Team oversees core programs within the ecosystem including early intervention, home visiting, child care, preschool, prenatal and maternal health, and behavioral health, among others.

KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



The Early Childhood Recommendations Panel is also an important component of the governance structure and was designated as the working group of the Early Childhood Advisory Council by Executive Order (Kansas Governor [Executive Order 20-02](#)). The Panel includes broad representation across the early childhood ecosystem, including families, program representatives, advocates, educators, researchers, and state agency staff (Kansas [Children's Cabinet](#), n.d.). The Panel meets monthly to examine proposals for policy and systems change from other bodies in the governance structure, elevating vetted proposals to the State Directors Team and the Kansas Children’s Cabinet. To date, three recommendations on Kindergarten Transitions, State and Local Interagency Coordinating Councils Collaboration Strategies, and Child Care Retention Bonuses have been approved by the Early Childhood Advisory Council.

In April 2020, Kansas was awarded a three-year PDG B-5 renewal grant to implement the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. Publication of the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan and the renewal grant award coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted Kansas children and families, the early childhood workforce, and communities. Though *All In For Kansas Kids* was developed to address long-term needs by ensuring a sustainable and high-quality early childhood ecosystem, this plan became essential for pandemic-era decision-making by informing responses to immediate early childhood ecosystem needs that arose during the public health crisis and the PDG B-5 renewal grant funding made implementation possible.

Since the pandemic onset, PDG B-5 funding has supported various system-building efforts across the state. This includes over \$8.7 million in subgrants used to enhance access to child care, engage families and ensure family knowledge and choice, promote kindergarten readiness, and improve the quality of early childhood services. Resources were intentionally provided to rural communities because they often encounter unique barriers to accessing services and supports. These funds also supported workforce development, purchase of classroom resources, development and enhancement of curriculum, parent training/support, enhancement of inclusion, and developing system capacity.

Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The early childhood ecosystem was put to the test during the COVID-19 pandemic. With a coordinated governance structure strengthened by the [PDG B-5 grant](#), Kansas was well positioned to respond to pandemic conditions impacting the early childhood ecosystem. Coordination and quick action by the State Directors Team, Child Care Aware of Kansas (CCA-KS), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO), and others led to \$300 million in relief funds awarded to over 12,000 child care professionals over the course of the pandemic.

"Getting grant monies helped a lot. We honestly did not have enough money to pay the bills when we only had four kids [in our child care program]. We couldn't make ends meet. There were also resources for hand sanitizer, face masks, gloves, and cleaning supplies. They set up a drive-through where we could pick up supplies. That was an absolute blessing."

Child care administrator

The [Kansas Hero Relief Child Care Assistance Program](#) launched March 24, 2020 to offset child care costs for families, many of which had multiple children in child care. Notable impacts were documented by the number of households receiving Child Care Assistance over the course of the pandemic. Households receiving assistance significantly decreased in the month following the pandemic emergency declaration, from 5,699 households in March 2020 to 4,372 households in April 2020, but increased to pre-pandemic levels after only three months of Hero Relief program's launch with 6,290 households enrolled. Monthly enrollment remained above 6,000 households for all of FY 2021 (KU-CPPR, 2022a) and increased to a monthly average of 7,324 households by FY 2023 (DCF, 2023a). The relatively quick rebound to pre-pandemic enrollment levels for Child Care Assistance, followed by the prolonged increase beyond pre-pandemic enrollment levels, were made possible because the Hero Relief Program extended eligibility.

From March 2020 through September 2022, eligibility for Child Care Assistance was expanded under the Hero Relief Program. This expansion extended coverage to any Kansas worker with an income at or below 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is \$75,000 annual income for a family of four, and to essential workers, and reduced family share deduction amounts from the total benefit ([EES Policy No. 20-08-08](#)). Additionally, a revision to this policy in July 2021 extended the program's eligibility period from six to twelve months ([EES Policy No. 21-06-04](#)). In short, these expansions to Child Care Assistance provided more households with increased Child Care Assistance for a longer duration.

The temporary Hero Relief Program was administered by DCF and supported by the federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) from the U. S. Department of Education and the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). DCF stopped taking applications for assistance under the Hero Relief Program on October 1, 2022, and applications received after that date become subject to guidelines of the regular Child Care Assistance Program ([EES Policy No. 22-08-02](#)). However, DCF made some of the pandemic changes permanent, including decreasing the required family share deduction (families have just a 3% responsibility to pay charges not covered by the Child Care Assistance Program) and increasing income limits from 185% to 250% FPL, which is an adjustment from a maximum annual income of \$55,500 for a family of four up to \$75,000.

Eligibility income limits increased for a family of four



Extending eligibility criteria for Child Care Assistance made this support available to more families, with almost 2,000 families earning between 185% and 250% FPL who became eligible, and over one-quarter of Kansas families who received assistance (DCF, 2023c). In other words, thousands more families have been able to access financial support for monthly child care costs, which were otherwise a significant cost burden for families who earned slightly more than the previous income threshold for Child Care Assistance eligibility.

While efforts to distribute federal relief and Child Care Assistance amidst the pandemic fast-tracked collaboration across the ecosystem to support children and families, underlying early childhood ecosystem inefficiencies were compounded by unprecedented operational challenges during the pandemic. These

layered challenges rippled throughout the early childhood ecosystem, ultimately impacting child care programs and children and families whom they serve. To illustrate, local health department leaders who resigned, retired, or were asked to resign between April 2020 and August 2021 shared that their top challenges were political divisiveness, lack of support from county leadership, lack of support and unrealistic expectations from the public, extreme work hours with high demands, and poor communication across public health infrastructure (Cain et al., 2022).

Although reasons for the departure of former local leaders were magnified by the pandemic, Kansas state agencies commonly experienced staffing turnover due to retirement or burnout, such as KDHE with roughly 40% of staff ages 50 and above and nearly 24% of total staff considering leaving the agency within a year (e.g., KDHE & KU-CPPR, 2021). Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programs administered by KDHE experienced a decrease of 32% in the number of full-time equivalent staff between 2020 and 2023 (KU-CPPR, 2023c). Fewer seasoned state agency leaders and staff resulted in loss of procedural and historical knowledge within state agencies and communication barriers between state agencies, in turn passing the burden of navigating this magnified fragmentation onto child care administrators. Turnover, regardless of the purpose, disrupts collaborative work, not only because of the loss of institutional knowledge and skills, but also because new relationships must be built from scratch.

“Turnover was harder because of the extra stresses associated with the pandemic. All of us had to do things we never envisioned being part of our job. Lately we’ve had new people coming on at a fast rate, and it has been a challenge to ensure we’re bringing them to the table.”
Agency representative

Through pandemic response efforts to provide stability for children, families, and professionals during unprecedented times, focus on sustainable child care emphasized the need for an integrated early childhood ecosystem in which related services and supports can be efficiently and effectively streamlined.

Findings

The early childhood ecosystem includes every program, service, resource, information system, and partnership needed to identify and support the needs of Kansas children, their families, communities, and the early childhood workforce. Efforts to strengthen this vital ecosystem must consider interdependencies, complexities, and nuances among multiple systems and partners. The following analysis presents our state’s recent successes and continued challenges around collaboration and alignment, tools and practices, and integrating data within the Kansas early childhood ecosystem.

Collaboration and Alignment

In 2019, the Governor declared early childhood a top priority for the state. Since then, we have seen this priority galvanize multiple partners from different sectors to play active roles in systems transformation. At the heart of this work is an increasing desire to leverage state-level resources to amplify ingenuity, insights, and trusted relationships of early childhood partners at the local level. This harmony of state and local efforts is a balancing act that requires awareness of needs, ability to quickly adapt, and commitment to support the right mix of solutions—solutions that truly center the needs of young children, their families, and professionals who serve them. Operations within the governance structure demonstrate increased collaboration and alignment across a fragmented early childhood ecosystem in Kansas, evidenced by strengthening relationships among state agencies, improving alignment through coordinated intakes and referrals, and emphasizing public-private partnerships to adequately fund child care and related services.

Stronger Collaborative Relationships Across the Early Childhood Ecosystem

In Kansas statute ([K.S.A. 38-1901](#)), the Kansas Children’s Cabinet is charged with assisting the Governor in developing and implementing a coordinated, comprehensive delivery system to serve children and families. The Kansas Children’s Cabinet has increasingly embraced this role and is recognized as a leader, facilitator, and strategist by policy-makers, community leaders, and current state agency partners. However, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet must rely on collaborative relationships to move systems-level work forward.

One way that early childhood ecosystem members are becoming more collaborative is by learning more about each other’s unique roles and efforts through the Kansas Early Childhood Governance Summit (*All In For Kansas Kids, 2023*), an annual convening of state agencies, coalitions, workgroups, and community partners.

The second annual Governance Summit was held in 2023, bringing thirteen diverse groups together to share their work and discuss alignment with the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. Similarly, regular meetings of these groups, such as monthly convenings of the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel, contribute to greater understanding, collaboration, and progress.

Kansas Early Childhood Governance Summit Participants

- [Early Childhood Recommendations Panel](#)
- [Child Care Systems Improvement Team](#)
- [Family Advisory Council](#)
- [Family First Statewide Interagency and Community Advisory Board](#)
- [Family Leadership Team](#)
- [Governor’s Behavioral Health Services Planning Council’s Children’s Subcommittee](#)
- [Home Visiting Leadership Group](#)
- [Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust Governance Board](#)
- [Kansas Early Learning Standards](#)
- [Maternal Child Health Council](#)
- [Quality Recognition and Improvement System Advisory Board](#)
- [State Interagency Coordinating Council](#)
- [Workforce Development Advisory Group](#)

To further enhance collaboration and alignment, key early childhood state agencies participated in the work of the Early Childhood Transition Task Force (Task Force) assembled by the Governor in January 2023 through Executive Order 23-01. Task Force membership included leaders from KDHE, DCF, the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Department of Commerce. The Task Force, coordinated by the [Hunt Institute](#), was charged with bringing forth recommendations in December 2023 to “creat[e] a framework for a model single-agency governance structure for early childhood programming that consolidates initiatives and funding under the leadership of a new cabinet-level position” ([Executive Order 23-01](#)). Recognizing the challenge of coordinated decision-making in a highly decentralized structure, Task Force members were interested to learn about possible ways forward. Throughout 2023, the Task Force analyzed the current system and fiscal streams in Kansas, researched lessons learned from other states, and conducted statewide listening sessions. The Task Force assembled substantial materials about the state’s current early childhood ecosystem and related programs, as well as progress on the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan to inform their work.

In addition to cross-agency collaboration, collaboration between state and local leadership groups is also important to consider because these groups bring together individuals with unique backgrounds, skillsets, expertise, and priorities, which could help or hinder systems alignment efforts. Therefore, in response to the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan, the collaboration was examined among the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel and Local Interagency Coordinating Councils (LICCs) using two tools: the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (Mattessich, 2018), which evaluates six domains—communication, environment, membership, process, purpose, resources, and the Levels of Collaboration Scale (Frey et al., 2006), which measures five areas—networking, cooperation, coordination, coalition, and collaboration. The quality of state-level collaboration among Panel members has improved according to the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (KSDE, 2023e). Data analysis showed enhanced Panel member perceptions about working in a positive social and political environment conducive to change (“Environment” score improved from 3.87 to 4.05), which supports collaborative efforts toward shared goals. Additionally, Panel members’ perceptions about having membership representation conducive to make progress improved from 3.76 to 4.17. For LICCs, conditions and perceptions of collaboration

remained somewhat positive with an average score around 4 and did not substantially change from 2019 to 2023 (KSDE, 2023e). However, slight improvements were noted for mutual respect and trust amongst LICC members, which increased from 4.09 to 4.15, and adequate resources available to local partners to support shared efforts, which grew from 3.57 to 3.86.

Membership representation is another aspect of collaboration. In early 2023, a dozen LICCs participated in a network analysis, replicating a study completed in 2019 as part of a statewide needs assessment of the Kansas Infant-Toddler Program (now the Kansas Early Childhood Development Services Program). The network analysis revealed that membership in LICCs had grown from an average of 18 members in 2019 to 25 members in 2023 (KSDE, 2023e). On average, networks in 2023 had greater representation from the business sector and more representation of higher education and behavioral health service professionals. While there is greater representation from business and early childhood professional sectors, family representation still must be improved within these councils and all other collaborative groups that span from local to state levels.

Additional strategies, such as those recommended by the [Early Childhood Recommendations Panel](#) (2022), can be implemented by LICCs and the SICCC to broaden participation and membership. Broadening participation and membership in state- and local-level decision-making is necessary to ensure that the early childhood ecosystem is inclusive of, and responsive to, all partners and their perspectives. For example, seeking funding to compensate members for their time, travel, and/or child care costs can support efforts to diversify membership, which will make for more responsive and representative leadership and decision-making groups within the early childhood ecosystem. Unified, collaborative efforts at state and local levels are underway to better connect children, families, and professionals to relevant supports within their communities. Following the Panel’s Recommendations can facilitate greater progress toward goals put forward in the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan.

“Getting everyone in the same room does not guarantee efficiency or collaboration. It’s deeper than that.”
Early childhood professional
(KU-CPPR, 2023a)

Although collaboration and alignment within the Kansas early childhood ecosystem have improved as a result of the strengthened governance structure and decision-making guidance put forward in the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan and Blueprint for Early Childhood, there are substantial limitations to this coordinated model. Regular meetings held by the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and State Directors Team serve as central touchpoints to facilitate collaboration across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem. However, this increased collaboration may be inadvertently hampered by constraints within each agency.

The structural constraints are illustrated by the fiscal maps presented in the final report of the Early Childhood Transition Task Force [Hunt Institute, 2023b], reproduced in [Figures 1, 2, and 3](#). Child care oversight and assistance are delivered through three programs, funded by four different sources and administered by two different agencies. There are five home visiting programs, administered by three different agencies, and supported by five different funding streams. State preschool programs, while all administered by KSDE, are funded by three different funding streams, two of which are allocated through DCF and the Children’s Cabinet.

Figure 1. Child Care Fiscal Map

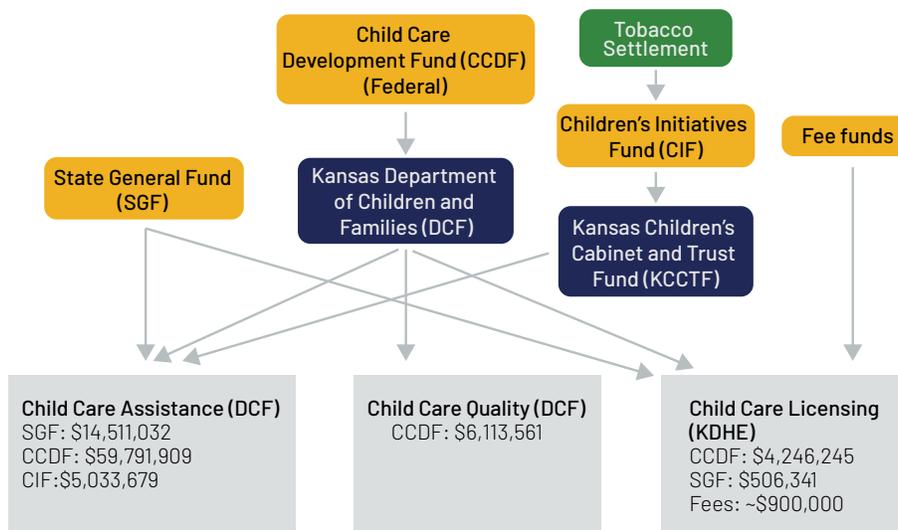


Figure 2. Home Visiting Fiscal Map

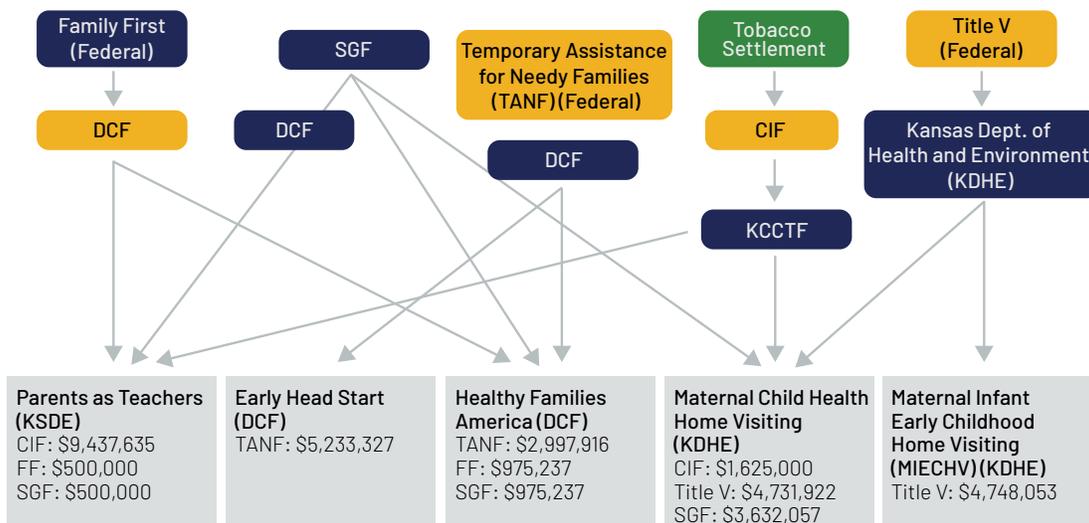
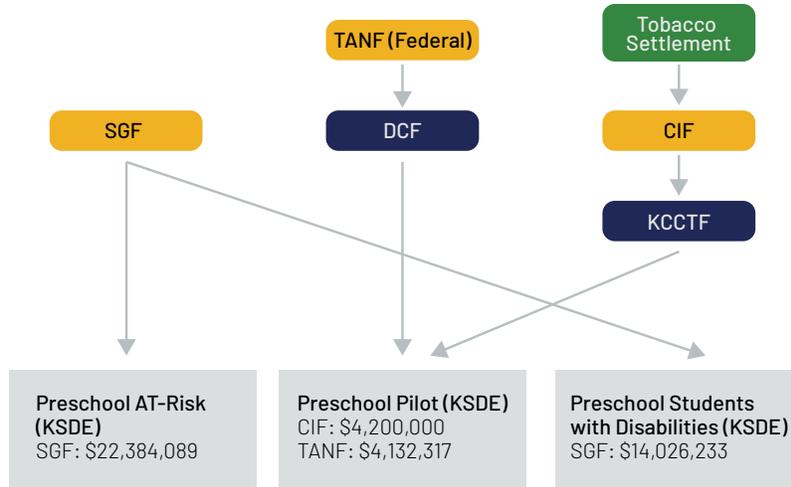


Figure 3. Preschool Fiscal Map



These differences create a patchwork of distinct silos, rather than facilitating transparency and reciprocity that allows for efficient and effective ecosystem collaboration and alignment. Despite efforts, the current fragmented early childhood ecosystem of related, yet separate agencies cannot be fully integrated for efficiency and effectiveness.

Table 1. KSDE Programs

Program	Service type	Funding	Numbers served
Parents as Teachers	Home Visiting	\$9,437,635 (CIF)	2021-22: 8,128 (children), 6,114 (families)
Preschool Aged At-Risk	Preschool	\$22,384,089 (SGF)	2021-22: 9,513 (children)
Kansas Preschool Pilot	Preschool	\$4,200,000 (CIF) \$4,132,317 (TANF)	2021-22: 4,963 (children)
State Enrollment Aid for Preschool Students with Disabilities	Preschool	\$14,026,233 (SGF)	2021-22: 5,961 (children)
State and Local Interagency Coordinating Councils	Governance	\$43,000 (IDEA Part C) \$7,000 (CCDF)	n/a
Ages and Stages Questionnaire	Developmental Screening	\$165,000 (SGF)	2022: 88,104
Child and Adult Care Food Program	Food assistance	\$29,371,945 (CNP-Federal USDA)	2022: 3,870,480 breakfast; 876,292 snacks; 4,090,361 lunch; 5,020,735 snacks

Note: Original sources did not specify whether numbers served were reported in federal or state fiscal years.

Table 2. Kansas Children’s Cabinet Programs

Program	Service type	Funding	Numbers served
Early Childhood Block Grant	Care and Education	\$21,017,930 (CIF)	FY22: 6,719 (children), 5,968 (families)
Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library of Kansas	Early Literacy	\$1,500,000 (CIF)	Fall 2023: Over 69,000
Early Childhood Infrastructure	System Building	\$1,400,733 (CIF)	n/a
Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention	Prevention	\$1,453,531 (Federal Grant)	2022: 1,600 (children), 700 (caregivers)
Child Care Capacity Accelerator Grants	Care and Education	\$55,018,294 (ARPA Discretionary, CCDF Discretionary, PDG Grant, and Private Funds)	n/a (projected to create 5,655 slots)
Preschool Development Implementation Grant Birth-5	Care and Education	\$26,829,000 (Federal Grant)	n/a
Preschool Development Planning Grant Birth-5	Care and Education	\$4,000,000 (Federal Grant)	n/a
Workforce Registry	Workforce/System Building	\$3,000,000 (CCDF Discretionary)	n/a
Early Childhood Integrated Data System	System Building	\$800,000 (TANF)	n/a

Note: Original sources did not specify whether numbers served were reported in federal or state fiscal years.

Table 3. DCF Programs

Program	Service type	Funding	Numbers served
Child Care Assistance	Care and Education	\$79,336,620 (CCDF, SGF)	Feb. 2023: 12,273 (children)
Child Care Quality	Care and Education	\$4,954,241 (CCDF) (Additional funds transferred to KDHE)	Various (Based in individual service)
Healthy Families America	Home Visiting	\$2,997,916 (TANF)	FY22: 2,014 (families)
Head Start Collaboration Office	Coordination and Collaboration Between Head Start and the Broader State System	\$102,551 (Federal Grant) \$34,184 (SGF)	7,758 (children), 6,865 (families)*
Kansas Early Head Start Child Care Partnership and Kansas Early Head Start Home Visitation	Child Care and Home Visiting	\$5,233,327 (TANF) \$7,506,797 (CCDF)	563 (children participating in Home Visiting), 387 (children participating in Child Care)
Parent Skill-Building (Families First Prevention Services Act)-Parents as Teachers	Home Visiting and Parent Education	\$1,000,000 (All Funds)	2022: 205 referrals
Parent Skill-Building (Families First Prevention Services Act)-Healthy Families America	Home Visiting	\$795,613 (All Funds)	2023: 120 (estimated families)
Parent Skill-Building (Families First Prevention Services Act)-Healthy Families America-2	Home Visiting	\$395,475 (All Funds)	2023: 195 (estimated families)
Family Preservation	Prevention	Various	2023: 1,500 (estimated families)

* These figures reflect the number of children and families served by community-based Head Start grantees. The Head Start Collaboration Office does not provide direct services.

Note: Original sources did not specify whether numbers served were reported in federal or state fiscal years.

Table 4. KDHE Programs

Program	Service type	Funding	Numbers served
Child Care Licensing and Early Youth Care Programs	Care and Education	\$4,246,254 (CCDF, SGF, Fees)	Total Licensed Capacity: 142,807 (8/2023)
Kansas Early Childhood Developmental Services (Part C)	Early Intervention	\$16,200,000 (SGF, CIF, Federal)	11,000 (children)
Newborn Hearing Screening Program	Screening	\$350,000 (HRSA, CDC)	36,207 (children)
Critical Congenital Heart Defect Program	Screening	Fee Funded	36,207 (children)
Birth Defects Program	Screening	Fee Funded	680 (children)
Newborn Screening Metabolic Follow-Up Program	Screening	Fee Funded	3,858 (children)
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Nutrition	\$61,025,252 (Federal and Private)	80,413 (total)
Title V	Family and Child Health	\$12,055,984 (Federal, State)	unknown
Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Home Visiting/ Universal Home Visiting	Home Visiting	\$1,650,000 (State)	2,047 (women)
Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)	Home Visiting	\$4,748,053 (Federal and State Match)	631 (children), 566 (caregivers)
Maternal Community Health Worker Pilot Project	Workforce	\$696,425 (Grants)	304 (families)
Kansas Special Health Care Needs Program	Family and Child Health	\$642,089 (Federal MCH Grant)	281 (children)
Bridges	Family and Child Health	\$50,000 (PDG)	30 (clients)
Holistic Care Coordination	Family and Child Health	\$57,600 (Federal MCH Grant)	224 (clients)
Primary Care Provider Care Coordination Expansion Project	Family and Child Health	PDG Funded	3 (providers)
Supporting You	Parent Education	\$45,000 (Federal MCH Grant)	100 (participants)
Help Me Grow	Family and Child Health	\$700,000 (state funds)	unknown
School Based Health Center Program	Family and Child Health	\$3,621,527 (Federal)	unknown
CARE Program	Family and Child Health	\$757,000 (SGF)	n/a
Kansas Perinatal Community Collaborative	Family and Child Health	Federal MCH Grant	543 (individuals)

Better Alignment Through Shared Referral Systems

Intake and referral systems facilitate children's and families' timely access to available early childhood services and supports for which they may be eligible. Within local communities, the Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS) is a web-based communication tool that facilitates the referral process, which can be customized to include cross-sector partners within local communities. IRIS provides an easy-to-use system that supports transparent communication, data-driven assessment of the effectiveness of IRIS and partner accountability, and the technology to connect partners regardless of their organizational data systems. Participating communities can access the real-time IRIS tool to gauge individual provider and program capacity and close referral loops. Communities can customize referral forms to meet local needs. Then, partners can track each independent referral for families in a community and can clearly identify where a family is in the process with another partner. IRIS also allows an organization to visibly display their capacity to receive referrals, allowing a community to self-assess which organizations are consistently "full," where the most referrals are going, which organizations effectively "close the loop," and how many referrals are successfully completed for families.

The reach of IRIS has continued to grow in Kansas, now serving 32 counties, nearly double the counties served in 2019. Additional vision-driven networks designed to address locally identified needs have launched, including a regional network established to coordinate and scale developmental health promotion activities in northwest Kansas. Recognizing that collaboration to serve families often crosses county and state lines, IRIS Champions in two geographic clusters relaunched as unified regional networks. These mergers reflect the natural interconnectedness of these communities, resulting in more cohesive networks of partners and increased service diversity available to families.

Collaboration across key state entities has facilitated engagement of crucial referral hubs in each network. For example, Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Programs in each network serve as a key entry point for services and reliable connector to resources that benefit the whole family. In another example, addressing perceived barriers to IRIS adoption with regional DCF leadership resulted in DCF Child Protective Service units engaging with local networks where they could connect families with early intervention, home visiting, and parent-skill building resources.

The number of partners involved in the Kansas IRIS networks has also nearly doubled since 2019, from 302 to 581 organizations. Each partner operates within an IRIS sector, which includes aging care, behavioral health, concrete supports, developmental disabilities, early childhood, education, family support, maternal and child health, other health services, and resource navigation. Engagement has increased among previously underrepresented sectors such as health services and behavioral health. Gaining buy-in from health providers and services such as safety net clinics, preventative cancer screening services, and non-clinical birth coaches, along with the development of standardized behavioral health referrals for families with school-aged children, allows for connections to a comprehensive range of services. All networks continue to diversify types of family support services as represented by new partnerships with preventative legal services, infant-death bereavement programs, and virtual parent support groups. Community-level innovations, such as IRIS, help families navigate the early childhood ecosystem by facilitating connections between families and potential services, supports, and resources that may be most relevant to them.

Public-Private Partnerships for Child Care

The importance of public-private partnerships is emphasized across the Blueprint for Early Childhood and *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. Structured and sustained public-private partnerships offer a path to ensure sustainable, high-quality care for children and families. Such partnerships can be seeded with relatively low levels of public investment and provide the ability to pivot to address changing circumstances and move at the pace communities need.

As starkly revealed across the nation during the pandemic, child care is in critical need of more payers into the system—both public and private. In Kansas, child care is paid for primarily from two sources: out-of-pocket by families and, for families who are eligible, Child Care Assistance funded through the federal Child Care and Development Fund (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2016). While the number of Kansas children whose families use Child Care Assistance has gradually increased over the past few years (as noted above), gaps persist between the current needs and available resources—public or private—to cover the cost of care.

If Kansas families and the early childhood workforce continue to bear the brunt of rising child care costs—

in both receiving and providing care—the state will face long-term implications in its larger economy and workforce. Child care spans multiple sectors and interests. Parents are not the only ones who depend on reliable care; employers and communities in which they are located benefit from sufficient child care options. Our state cannot experience economic growth unless the Kansas workforce of today has access to safe, reliable child care for their children. Our children are the Kansas workforce of tomorrow, so it is critical that we devote resources to provide high-quality care that is focused on early learning and healthy development, especially in the first three years, to prepare our children to be thriving adults. Dedicated caregivers across Kansas provide essential support for young children and their families, while simultaneously contributing to our state’s overall productivity and economic stability.

We all will benefit from transformative improvements to the system, including moving to a multi-payer model to fully cover the true cost of high-quality care. In recognition of this, the Task Force published their Interim Report on July

1, 2023, which called for more public-private partnerships to increase the availability and accessibility of child care and establish child care as an essential part of community infrastructure (Hunt Institute, 2023c).

Companies investing in on-site child care can increase both employee retention and morale while reducing pressure on community-based child care programs. Expanding public-private partnerships in communities across Kansas can help establish alternate funding streams, provide supplies and technological support to child care administrators and professionals, and form stronger connections between educational institutions and child care centers. Nationally, some of the most innovative and tractable solutions to expanding child care access include employers in the equation. Under the [Michigan Tri-Share Program](#), for example, child care costs are split evenly between families, the state, and employers. Similar programs have been introduced in [Kentucky](#) and [North Dakota](#). In Kansas, communities are exploring innovative multi-payer child care business models to improve child care capacity and sustainability.

MULTI-PAYER CHILD CARE BUSINESS MODELS



Michigan: MI Tri-Share

The cost of an employee’s child care is equally shared among the employer, the employee, and the State of Michigan – a three-way split – with regional coordination provided by a MI Tri-Share facilitator hub.

Kentucky: Employee Child Care Assistance Partnership Program

The cost of an employee’s child care is shared by the employer, the employee, and Kentucky’s Cabinet for Health and Family Services. The amount contributed by the Cabinet is based on family size and income level.

North Dakota: Child Care Assistance Program

The cost of child care for families who are working or participating in education or training programs is shared between the family and the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services. The amounts contributed by families and the Department are based on family size and income level.

Recognizing the interdependence between economic vitality and high-quality child care, the Department of Commerce has collaborated with the Kansas Children’s Cabinet to increase access to child care. This has included a set-aside for child care projects in the [Community Development Block Grant](#) (CDBG) that encourages new business development and expansion projects in Kansas communities to prioritize child care and employee quality of life in their decision-making. Additionally, the [Community Service Tax Credit Program](#) (CSP) is an initiative that incentivizes child care expansion by awarding tax credits to qualified donors in rural communities. In 2023, almost [\\$1 million in CSP tax credits](#) were targeted toward projects seeking to address the child care shortage. Funding initiatives like the CDBG and CSP are key activities that bring together diverse partners and innovative ideas to directly address child care shortages in local communities. In many counties across Kansas, local economic development representatives and business communities are forming child care task forces to accomplish this goal. Examples include:

- **Wichita County.** Wichita County Economic Development partnered with the local K-State Research and Extension office, local school district, Head Start, and other local organizations to build a new child care center.
- **Douglas County.** The Lawrence Chamber of Commerce is one of several key partners working to secure funding for a building which will house The Community Children Center’s Family Resource Center, Provider Support Program, and child care program. The project will create 140 new child care slots.
- **Marion County.** Local business leaders worked with the city of Hillsboro and the Hillsboro Community Foundation to create the non-profit Hillsboro Community Child Care (H4C), which has received a donated building from Trinity Mennonite Church and is working to secure funds for renovations. Once operational, the building will house a child care center capable of caring for 99 children from birth to age five.



Community Child Care Capacity Building

Child Care Aware of Kansas (CCA-KS), through PDG and DCF CCDF funding, provides regional supports to communities seeking to build and maintain child care capacity from pre-planning to ongoing programmatic support and every step in between. Public and private funding generally require implementation plans to demonstrate how child care programs will support affordable, high-quality child care in their local Kansas communities. These community-specific plans call for committed groups to initiate planning and maintain capacity-building activities to sustain child care in their communities.

Community Child Care Capacity Building Process



STEP 1: Pre-planning to build initial readiness

- Initial coalition-forming.
- Community-level needs assessment.
- Guidance on economic impact.



STEP 2: Developing a plan through a Communities in Action (CIA) Workshop

- Learning from early childhood experts and other content experts from across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem.
- Receiving customized child care supply/demand data.
- Identifying and developing short- and long-term goals during structured planning time with an expert community coach.
- Receiving a child care capacity toolkit .



STEP 3: Seeking funding opportunities

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).
- Community Service Tax Credit Program (CSP).
- Community Capacity Building Grants (as available).



STEP 4: Following up with implementation support

- Ongoing support tailored to the readiness, pace, and scale of each community to successfully execute the action plan.



STEP 5: Ongoing support from Child Care Go Team

- A continuum of supports to navigate community-specific needs and barriers.
- May include identification of community assets, resources and funding, child care solution design, navigation of state and local licensing and building regulations, and subsidy enrollment supports.

Community Spotlight

Child Care Solutions

Ellis County: EcoDevo Partners

- Ellis County acknowledges the pivotal role of child care in supporting its economy. The 2021 Ellis County Health Needs Assessment highlighted the profound impact of quality child care on family well-being and workforce stability. Recognizing this, the Hays Chamber of Commerce convened the Child Care Task Force in September 2021, focusing on employers' workforce concerns. Their goal is to establish a high-quality child care programs, attracting employees and fostering future community leaders.
- The task force leveraged the voices of elected officials and employers to secure local business support, expanded capacity, and apply for grants. Public and private support followed as a result, including pandemic relief funding, contributions from the Dane G. Hansen Foundation and businesses.
- Ellis County's success underscores the vital role of child care in supporting both healthy families and a thriving local economy, and demonstrates innovative ways to blend public and private funding streams.

Dickinson County: Stronger Together

In the last three years, substantial investments have transformed Kansas communities, with Dickinson County as a standout example. Three rural towns united to address child care challenges:

- **Capacity** In Herington, a child care center was established in 2020, and with state support, is expanding to double capacity in 2024.
- **Affordability** In Solomon, an affordable child care center that accepts state Child Care Assistance will be opening for 24 children.
- **Workforce** In Abilene, a training and recruitment program was implemented to strengthen the local early childhood workforce.

Through authentic engagement, coalition building, and leveraging local and state resources, these child care administrators are improving the lives of Kansas children and families. Their combined efforts will increase child care supply by 31% in 2024. Dickinson County's success serves as a model for how collaboration within one county can secure investments in early childhood and develop community-specific solutions.

McPherson County: Cultivating the Early Childhood Workforce

- In 2018, McPherson County recognized the child care challenge: A shortage of highly qualified professionals due to low pay. In 2021, a task force was formed to create more child care slots and offer competitive wages for child care professionals. Partners like K-State Extension and the McPherson County Community Foundation played vital roles.
- Together, they secured a \$500,000 grant to enhance the workforce, develop degree pathways, and streamline administrative tasks through a shared service center. The goal: Create 250 new slots and a Dream Fund to reduce family costs to \$500 per child per month. McPherson County's success demonstrates that community engagement and state support can facilitate workforce development to ensure availability of high-quality child care.

Cross-Agency Collaboration

In 2023, state agency partners collaborated with the private sector to braid funds successfully for the Accelerator grant program. **The Kansas Children's Cabinet awarded nearly \$55 million in grants to 67 organizations to accelerate the creation of new, high-quality licensed child care slots.** As part of these Accelerator grants, \$3 million in additional funding was awarded across 16 Kansas communities that proposed innovative strategies to sustainably address child care needs by leveraging partnerships and community investments, often through matched funding. The Accelerator is expected to create 5,655 new slots over the next few years. Kansas agency leaders recognize that addressing the child care capacity shortage in significant and meaningful ways requires blending of financial resources. The Accelerator grant program braided funding from four public and private sources:

\$1 million

Federal Preschool Development Birth-5 planning grant
(through ACF).

The State Fiscal Recovery Fund of the American Rescue Plan (approved by the SPARK Executive Committee and State Finance Council).

\$20 million

\$31 million

Federal Child Care Development Block Grant ARPA Discretionary funds (through DCF).

The Patterson Family Foundation gift.

\$2.5 million

On the Horizon...

In fall 2023 and early 2024, Kansas began awarding \$38 million through a competitive grant program for capital improvements to facilities that offer child care, made possible by the United States Treasury under the Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund (CPF) program. **In October 2023, the first round of awards totaling \$10 million was approved, and an additional \$28 million will be awarded in February 2024.**

The Accelerator grant program is a promising model for how multiple funding streams can be blended and braided to address child care needs. The federal government is the nation's largest funder of early childhood programs, and federal dollars typically follow the path of least resistance: health dollars to health agencies, education dollars to education agencies, and so forth (First Five Years Fund [FFYF], 2023b). This fragmentation of resources can cause potential duplication of effort and administration costs, suboptimal coordination across programs, and,

most notably, bureaucratic mazes for families seeking services. Distribution of federal funds, communication, and policy making usually follow the distinct missions and procedures of each agency, with compliance mandates stemming from the requirements of each unique funding source. The best interests of the young child and the needs of the family can sometimes take second place in favor of adherence to these often conflicting and confusing regulatory constraints.

In efforts to begin reconciling regulatory differences, KDHE (2023a) conducted a comprehensive review of 59 child care licensure regulations. Researchers recommend that child care licensure reviews, like the one conducted by KDHE, can be informed and strengthened by rigorous economic research on the effects of licensing on child safety and health to maximize positive outcomes for children and families, and ultimately Kansas (Heggeness et al., 2024). As of September 5, 2023, there have been proposed changes for 43 regulations. These efforts are anticipated to increase statewide capacity for child care, modernize early childhood practices, support early childhood professional development, and ensure initial health and safety training and better alignment with federal requirements. The proposed changes have been reviewed by the Governor’s Office and the KDHE Executive Team and are moving through the state regulation promulgation process. Adoption and implementation of these proposed changes are anticipated to go into effect in 2024.

Lessons learned from navigating public-private partnerships for child care will inform our future efforts. First and foremost, we must continue to support community-driven, public-private partnerships because they generate child care solutions that are specific to each community. Additionally, the regulation overhaul is a significant accomplishment that will help to resolve inefficiency and align priorities, serving as a model as we continue identifying challenges and cross-agency collaboration to address.

Connecting the Dots for Families, Professionals, and Communities

As we work to better support collaboration and alignment across the early childhood ecosystem, various partner groups have focused on connecting families, professionals, and communities to relevant services and supports. Increased efforts to implement innovative tools, practices, and approaches across the ecosystem have improved ecosystem navigation by ensuring that families and early childhood professionals can access relevant services and supports.

A key finding of the 2019 Needs Assessment was that families needed to adopt a “connect the dots” approach to navigate services across sectors. Here is a range of approaches that were developed and implemented to help families and professionals navigate the early childhood ecosystem:

1-800-CHILDREN

This statewide helpline has grown in scope and reach as a 24-hour resource for families and early childhood professionals seeking care and education support, information, and resources.

Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS)

This referral and intake system has been implemented in many Kansas communities to strengthen professional partnerships and streamline access to resources and services.

Telehealth

Efforts have increased around identifying and supporting telehealth opportunities that improve access to specialty services in rural areas.

Home Visiting Leadership Teams

Teams are working collaboratively to increase access to home visiting services and care coordination pilot work at KDHE.

Child Care Matters

This step-by-step guide, developed by KDHE and supported by PDG funding, helps child care administrators navigate licensing requirements and processes.

Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ)

Professional access to the ASQ, an evidence-based, standardized screening tool, has been expanded across Kansas and helps connect families to the right services as early as possible.

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library

In August 2023, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet, in collaboration with the Dollywood Foundation and statewide community partners, announced that the Imagination Library would now be available to every child in Kansas from birth to their fifth birthday. Every eligible child in Kansas can enroll to receive one free, high-quality, age-appropriate book per month.

Child Care in Kansas website

This consumer education website, administered by DCF and coordinated with partners across the state, is a “one-stop shop” experience for families, providers, communities, and employers as they navigate child care and relevant topics. Since its launch in September 2023, the site has averaged 30,000 users per month.

Quality Assurance Strategies

Kansas aims to provide high-quality early childhood services to children and families to support healthy development, strong families, and early learning. Quality assurance measures are regularly implemented to evaluate programs across early childhood settings, including child care, preschool, and home visiting programs.

High-Quality Classrooms

As part of the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) evaluation, grantees are assessed with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a measure of classroom quality. Since 2018, the evaluation has increasingly identified more high-quality classrooms every year in Kansas. Notably, the 2023 ECBG evaluation found that quality averages were above benchmark for all CLASS indicators, and **there was a 10% increase in high-quality classrooms identified from fall 2022 to spring 2023**, from 67% to 77% (n = 556). *Schrepferman, 2023*

Links to Quality

Through DCF, Kansas continues to build and refine the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), [Links to Quality \(L2Q\)](#), which provides early childhood programs with a path toward quality improvement above and beyond that of standard licensing requirements. L2Q is composed of standards in four content areas: program administration, family partnerships, health and safety, and learning and development. Across the state, **36 early childhood programs successfully participated in a two-year L2Q pilot program and provided valuable feedback to improve the program's infrastructure**. Next, these same early childhood programs will pilot the L2Q's first pathway for demonstrating program administration competencies. Upon completing this pilot, participating early childhood programs will be the first to earn one of four future "Links" demonstrating high quality across program standards.

The Kansas Early Learning Standards

[The Kansas Early Learning Standards \(KELS\)](#), revised in 2023 and adopted by the Kansas Children's Cabinet in its role as state Early Childhood Advisory Council in 2024, promote quality early childhood learning opportunities and environments. The KELS provide early childhood professionals and families with **up-to-date, research-based guidance regarding the scope and sequence of early childhood development**, serving as a clear overview for the complex and foundational learning that caring, knowledgeable adults can facilitate. Early childhood professionals can utilize this multi-purpose tool as they plan developmentally appropriate activities, select and implement evidence-based curricula, and partner with families around early learning. This is the fourth version of the KELS since being introduced in 2006 and the first revision in over a decade.

Continuous Quality Improvement

Beginning in 2022, the KDHE Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Team utilized parent-child interaction observations to support positive caregiver-child interactions. Following these CQI efforts, the **Parent Child Interaction screening rate benchmark improved by 10.1% from 63.1% of families receiving an observation in 2021 to 73.2% in 2023**. *Kansas MIECHV Program, 2023*

Another way of connecting the dots for Kansas children, families, and communities is through prevention education, which can provide a range of interrelated benefits. Community-based efforts through the Chronic Disease Risk Reduction (CDRR) program have been found to support tobacco cessation and prevention, promote healthy activities and habits, and prioritize health (KU-CPPR, 2022b). As an example, Community Baby Shower events combined education about safe sleep, breastfeeding, parenting, and tobacco cessation and prevention along with disseminating resources and materials for new parents in need. In addition to informational and educational support, these community events also served as opportunities for new or soon-to-be parents to establish social connections and peer support. Because parent and caregiver actions and decisions shape their children's environments and experiences, prevention education can facilitate a range of benefits, such as connecting families to other services and supports across the early childhood ecosystem and their communities.

Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust

The Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust oversees the state's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) resources and implementation. The intent is to derive value and efficiency in sharing and integrating early childhood data across five state agencies to inform impact, effectiveness, fiscal return on investment, and access to services for children and families in Kansas.

An important initiative of both PDG B-5 and the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan is the Kansas Early Childhood Data Trust (Data Trust), which established a governing board whose members are committed to using a data-driven approach to inform the future of our early childhood system. The Data Trust Governance Board, with the Kansas Children's Cabinet as Trustee, meets quarterly to develop sustainable practices for reviewing and prioritizing authorized projects and best practices for improving both data use and data literacy. Together, these agencies have developed practices and tools to allow sharing of data and information in ways that will improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of programs and services for Kansas children and families. The Data Trust makes this essential work possible. Over time, this kind of collaboration and targeted analysis of our state's return on investment across programs, and over the course of a child's life, will help ensure brighter futures for Kansas children and families.



While the newly formed Data Trust has become the mechanism for enabling safe and secure data sharing among state agencies, dedicated resources are needed to truly transform the way the Kansas early childhood ecosystem collects, analyzes, and uses data for impact. To fully realize the potential of the Data Trust, we need to regularly involve agency staff, researchers, and community members to articulate research questions and divide up the work and resources to know the current impact of collective actions across the early childhood ecosystem.

Authorized Projects

Currently, there are two Authorized Projects executed under the Data Trust to develop usable insights from data collected within the early childhood ecosystem:

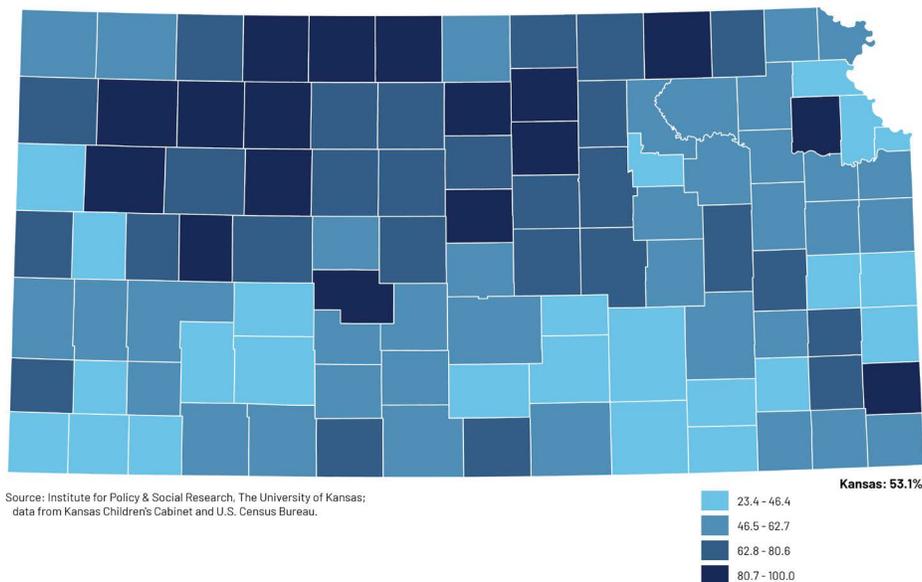
- The Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) and the Prevention of Foster Care Removals.
- The Distinct Count of Children in Early Care and Education Services.

In [Authorized Project 1](#), researchers conducted a pilot study that linked and integrated ECBG data with DCF data to identify the most effective systems approach for preventing child maltreatment and family separation (Data Trust, 2021). Pilot study results showed that children were significantly less likely to be placed in foster care after their families participated in services within the early childhood ecosystem, compared to children whose families had not participated in services ([Data Trust, 2022](#)). Insights from this pilot study suggest that children and families have better chances of thriving when they are connected to relevant supports in a timely manner. In short, intervening early to support children and families works and this approach requires a coordinated, collaborative, streamlined early childhood ecosystem.

Authorized Project 2 is the Distinct Count of Children in Early Care and Education Services ([Data Trust, 2022](#)). Through this project, the [Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard](#) was developed and launched in December 2023 to provide the best available data for unduplicated, accurate counts of children and families served in Kansas. This publicly available tool supports cross-agency collaboration across the early childhood ecosystem while also providing the general public with access to the same data. Further, this Authorized Project established a better understanding of existing data systems across agencies in the ecosystem. This tool allows us to identify areas for improvement, help us better define our state's early childhood ecosystem, and refine our understanding of child and family needs that vary based on several factors, such as demographics, economics and geography.

The Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard is already being put to use. [Figure 4](#) provides estimates of the percentage of children served by the Kansas early childhood programs in each county, which include child care, home visiting, early intervention services, and preschool. In four counties, the estimated number of children served exceeded population estimates of the total number of children. These values were top-coded at 100% for the map below. Though these estimates may not capture every early childhood program and may include some duplicates in the distinct count, data coordinated through Authorized Project 2 help us identify where more focused efforts and supports are needed across the state.

Figure 4. Percent of Children Served by Early Childhood Programs in Kansas, by County, 2022



Distinct Count Data Highlights

212,462

The estimated number of children under 6 years old in Kansas.

The number of children who received early childhood services.

113,523

47%

The percentage of children ages 3- to 5-years-old who participate in early childhood services. This is the highest percentage among all age groups.

35,475 served/75,061 children based on age data.

The percentage of children under 6 years old who were served by home visiting programs.

12,321 children served / 212,462 children under 6 years old.

<6%

Source: *Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard (Kansas Children's Cabinet, 2023)*

The original intent and ultimate goal of Authorized Project 2 is to create a cross-system database of unduplicated data and a distinct count of individuals served. These data would enable statistical methods, such as multivariate regression and social network analysis, to identify the impact of services across the ecosystem and throughout the lifespan. Additionally, these results will help inform partners how to effectively intervene with specific populations. Navigating privacy requirements remains

a central challenge to realizing this goal. Through the Data Trust, Kansas is becoming better able to make data-informed decisions and follow the long-term impact of those decisions. Yet, we have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to do much more to improve and accelerate data sharing efforts that address underserved populations, issues of accessing supports, and enhance understandings of where to make targeted investments in response to Needs Assessment findings.

Early Childhood Transition Task Force

Nearly two decades ago, other states started developing solutions to streamline programs and services for children and families, an approach that has gained momentum in recent years as more states have been engaging in similar efforts (Hunt Institute, 2023a). Approaches to unify early childhood programs and services have varied across states but remain a bipartisan initiative generally focused on improving consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness for all early childhood ecosystem partners. For example, Colorado and Missouri leaders have developed single entities within their respective states that are dedicated to serving young children and families through a streamlined early childhood ecosystem (Hunt Institute, 2023a). In Kansas, during listening sessions held across the state as part of the Task Force work, there was consensus among attendees that the biggest barriers to better alignment within our ecosystem are cross-agency inconsistencies and inefficiencies (KU-CPPR, 2023a). Current and potential child care administrators reported frustrations with navigating dual requirements of licensing through KDHE (KU-CPPR, 2023a).

 <p>COLORADO</p> <p>Established an entirely new state-level Department of Early Childhood.</p>	 <p>KANSAS</p> <p>Operates a coordinated governance structure across multiple state agencies that provide services to children and families.</p>	 <p>MISSOURI</p> <p>Developed a new division, the Office of Childhood, under the state's existing Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.</p>
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Based on discussion and feedback generated from statewide listening session participants, the Task Force identified the following considerations to improve the early childhood ecosystem's consistency and efficiency (Counts & Gardner, 2023; KU-CPPR, 2023a):

- formalize decision-making authority across state agencies
- enhance coordination across many service models
- streamline/align/optimize funding streams towards common goals
- improve access to services and supports for young children, families, and early childhood professionals
- develop a consolidated, modernized data system that eases community and program reporting burdens and equips decision-makers with needed information
- bolster support for professionals across the ecosystem
- better leverage federal funds (e.g. CCDF)
- build capacity for underutilized programs (e.g. universal home visiting)

With Executive Order 23-01, Governor Kelly designated the Task Force to work towards creating a single-agency governance structure that consolidates initiatives and funding under the leadership of a new Cabinet-level position.

Early Childhood Transition Task Force Timeline

January 10, 2023

Governor Kelly signed Executive Order 23-01, creating the Task Force.

February 21, 2023

Governor Kelly announced Task Force membership. The Hunt Institute, which focuses on education policy support, was recognized as providing staffing support to help Kansas establish an effective and efficient early childhood ecosystem.

March 31, 2023

Meeting 1: The Kansas Early Childhood Landscape. A working draft of the [Kansas Early Childhood Program Inventory](#) was presented.

May 16, 2023

Meeting 2: Lessons from Other States. A detailed review was presented of other state approaches to unifying early childhood: organizational structure, leadership, governance, and timeline. (Hunt Institute, 2023d).

June 27-30, 2023

Community Engagement Tour. Engaged community partners in listening sessions across Kansas.

July 1, 2023

Interim Report from Task Force issued. (Hunt Institute, 2023c)

August 17, 2023

Meeting 3: Lessons from Community Engagement Tour. Synthesis of community engagement sessions was presented and initial recommendations were discussed. Task Force created three work groups to develop recommendations on programmatic movements, transition logistics, and metrics and data.

September 21-28, 2023

Work Groups met to begin developing draft recommendations.

October 18, 2023

Draft Task Force Recommendations presented and reviewed. Recommendations and feedback developed into blueprint for consolidation.

December 11, 2023

Final Report from Task Force delivered to Governor Kelly. Following delivery of the report and sample legislation, Governor Kelly will determine how her administration will proceed and utilize the Task Force's recommendations to improve the early childhood system in Kansas.



The Kansas Early Childhood Workforce

Introduction and Guiding Questions

In this section, we describe the early childhood workforce and the supports needed to sustain high-quality professionals working with young children and their families. We envision a cohesive system that recruits, retains, and advances a diverse workforce qualified to meet the changing needs of young children and families. Although our workforce includes a range of professional fields beside child care, such as early intervention, early education, home visiting, infant/toddler mental health, and social work, we focus on child care here because that has been identified as the greatest need and must be tackled first.

While strides were made to streamline workforce development opportunities, systemic changes are still necessary to attract and retain highly qualified child care professionals in the early childhood workforce. Further, child care professionals across Kansas must be respected and feel valued for their essential role of facilitating early learning and healthy development for our youngest Kansans. The *All In for Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan outlines goals for supporting the workforce and identifies key strategies to recruit, retain, and value early childhood professionals. Those strategies informed questions that guided this section:

How effective are efforts to recruit and retain highly qualified child care professionals in Kansas? What strategies are being implemented to recruit, train, and retain highly qualified early childhood professionals? What challenges still exist for growing and strengthening the workforce?

How is Kansas implementing high-quality, competency-based professional development? What are the gaps or barriers for professionals to access and participate in professional development opportunities?

Workforce Accomplishments

KANSAS CHILD CARE WORKFORCE

18,051
child care
professionals

in the Kansas workforce.

DCF, 2024; KDHE, 2024



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To date, the Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO) Child Care Development Accreditation (CDA) has awarded...



1,439

professional
development and
support service
scholarships



74

Completions
with KCCTO CDA



135

Participants
supported on
training track

PROJECTED CAPACITY INCREASE

Initiatives funded through the Child Care Accelerator grant program are projected to create

5,655
child care slots



TEMPORARY FUNDING

4,125
child care programs
were supported

by The American Rescue Plan's
Child Care Stabilization Program.



Average funding distributions per child care program

Center-based
\$111,600 (avg)
largely dedicated
toward staffing costs.

Home-based
\$18,000
primarily covered
overhead costs.

These temporary investments
indirectly supported 127,300 children
across the state but funding was
only authorized through September 2023.

WORKFORCE SUPPORT

\$29,668,250

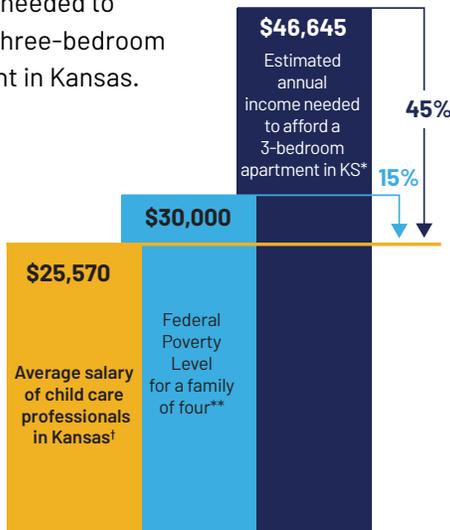
in **Child Care Workforce Appreciation Bonuses** were distributed to support 12,556 child care professionals across Kansas. Bonuses ranged from **\$750 to \$2,500**.



Workforce Gaps

INCOME DISPARITY

Kansas child care professionals earn an average salary of \$25,570[†], which is below the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four at \$30,000[‡] and far below the estimated annual income of \$46,645[‡] needed to afford a three-bedroom apartment in Kansas.

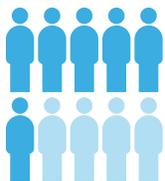


[†]BLS, 2023b ^{**}HHS, 2023

[‡]National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2023

AWARENESS OF CORE COMPETENCIES

Respondents to the KCCTO Statewide Workforce Needs Assessment indicate that they...



are unaware of early childhood core competencies (60%)



do not have professional development plans (44%)

UNMET CHILD CARE NEEDS

Kansas has an estimated unmet child care need of about 56%*, which is in part attributable to the shortage of child care professionals[†].



According to KDHE (2023b), total licensed child care facilities decreased from 2012-2021 but began increasing in 2023. As of August 31, 2023 total licensed capacity was at its highest point since KDHE began tracking in 2008.

*CCA-KS, 2023b [†]CCA-KS, 2023a

STAFF TURNOVER

MCH public health programs experienced a **decrease of 32% in full-time equivalent staff** between 2020 and 2023.

KU-CPPR, 2023c

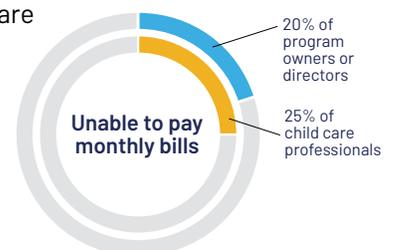
INCOME CONSIDERATIONS

In a survey of Kansas child care professionals...



67% of child care professionals indicate that **wages and benefits are a top priority** when deciding where to work.

About 20% of child care program owners or directors and 25% of child care professionals are **unable to pay their bills every month.**



Kaminski & Green, 2022

Workforce Summary Findings

Findings related to the Kansas early childhood workforce were developed through in-depth review of existing data and relevant reports (see [Introduction Section](#)), collection of perspectives from across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem, and data synthesis of these important yet distinct insights.

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.**



AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE

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

! **Future sustainability of the field without long-term funding infrastructure is questionable.**



Kansas Early Childhood Professionals

The early childhood workforce consists of professionals across the many disciplines that make up the early childhood ecosystem. Early childhood professionals facilitate high-quality, early learning and development for young children, and they support families to do the same, which occurs through child care, early intervention (EI), preschool, and early childhood special education. Additionally, professionals promote child and family well-being through early childhood, as well as related sectors, such as mental health, health care, behavioral health, and economic and employment supports. Depending on which services and supports are being provided to whom and by whom, professionals work across home-, center-, community-, school-, clinic-, and virtual-based settings. More than 18,051 professionals make up the child care workforce in Kansas and serve in a range of settings and roles, as displayed in [Table 5](#) and [Table 6](#) (DCF, 2024; KDHE, 2024; KSDE, 2023a).

Table 5. Licensed Facilities in the Kansas Child Care Workforce

Facility Type	Count*	Titles/Roles
Child Care Centers including licensed Head Starts	12,673	Owner/operator, Program Director, Assistant Program Director, Teaching Staff
Licensed Day Care Homes	1,842	Owner/operator, Program Director Primary Caregiver
Group Day Care Homes	1,748	Owner/operator, Program Director, Primary Caregiver
Preschools	342	Owner/operator, Program Director, Assistant Program Director, Teaching Staff
Total Professionals	16,605	

Table 6. Unlicensed (Legally Exempt) Facilities in the Kansas Child Care Workforce

Facility Type	Count	Titles/Roles
Unlicensed Head Starts	298 [#]	Lead Teacher, Assistant Teacher
Public Preschools including special education	1,113 [^]	Pre-Kindergarten licensed teacher
Private Accredited Preschools	35 [^]	Pre-Kindergarten licensed teacher
Military Child Care Programs (home or center)	Unknown	N/A
Total Professionals	1,446 (excluding Military programs)	

* Kansas Department of Health and Environment, January 2024.

[^] Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) Education Directory Report data (Early Childhood/Preschool and Early Childhood Special Education personnel) as of December 2023 https://uapps.ksde.org/Directory_Rpts/default.aspx; although the majority of public school PreK programs are not licensed, some of the staff could be working in licensed facilities and already counted in the 16,605 total.

[#] Kansas Department for Children and Families Head Start Collaboration Office, January 2024.

According to CCA-KS (2023a), the number of licensed child care programs in Kansas decreased by 10.9% between 2019 and 2022. From 2022 to 2023, there was a slight increase with 80 newly licensed programs, but there are still 415 fewer programs now than there were in 2019. With home-based child care programs being a large part of the closures in Kansas, there are now fewer program staff in home-based programs and more located in center-based programs when comparing current numbers reported in [Table 5](#) to those reported in the 2021 Needs Assessment Update. Additionally, the number of child care professionals across the state has slightly increased (1,791) between these two reports.

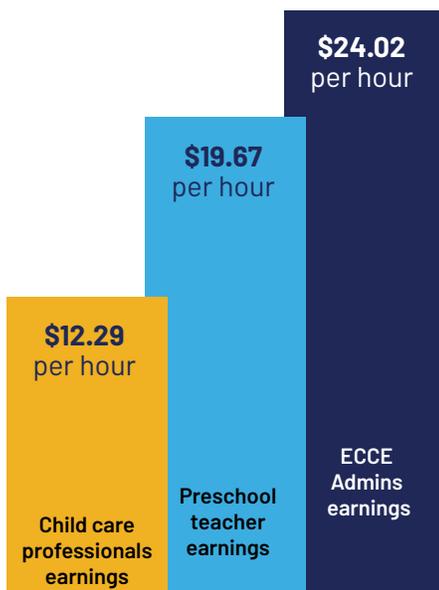
Currently, Kansas has an estimated unmet child care need of about 56%, which means that the demand for child care is higher than the supply of child care professionals and programs (CCA-KS, 2023b), and the shortage of child care professionals is considered a contributing factor to the gap between child care supply and demand (CCA-KS, 2023a). While supply is low, child care costs have been increasing for families. Yet, child care professional earnings are frequently below the Federal Poverty Level.



There are over
4,500
licensed child care
programs in Kansas.

Licensed child care programs in Kansas include public and private home-, center-, and school-based programs (KDHE, 2023f). Child care professionals across these programs meet children’s basic needs while facilitating age-appropriate learning; they support social, emotional, cognitive, and motor development. Additionally, child care professionals can facilitate environments where children can develop healthy habits and routines, such as planning, preparing, and cleaning up nutritious meals, and can connect families to relevant resources, such as public health supports (KU-CPPR, 2022b). Of the total child care programs in Kansas, more than 3,200 are home-based programs (KDHE, 2023f). Child care administrators have competing demands because they serve as early childhood professionals and small-business owners who must manage the responsibilities of running a business (e.g., banking, purchasing supplies, cleaning) in addition to facilitating early learning and development (National Conference of State Legislators, 2021).

“If child care professionals were predominately male, would the pay/support be greater?” *Early childhood professional (KU-CPPR, 2023a)*



In the 2019 Needs Assessment, we identified an urgent need for better compensation, benefits, and training for the early childhood workforce. Although many early care and education professionals have extensive experience, with almost half (48.1%) having at least 16 years in the field (Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities [KCCTO], 2022), they generally earn very low wages. Child care professionals earn the least out of all professionals in the early childhood workforce with an average hourly wage of \$12.29, which is about two-thirds the average hourly wage of preschool teachers (\$19.67) and about half the average hourly wage of early childhood administrators (\$24.02; Center for the Study of Child Care Employment [CSCCE], 2021).

Additionally, early childhood professionals who work in public school-based programs generally earn higher wages, compared to their peers in private in-home and small center-based programs, and commonly receive comprehensive benefits packages that include health insurance and retirement plans (CSCCE, 2021). In a survey with 196 Kansas child care professionals, two-thirds (67%) of participants indicated that wage and benefit offerings were a top priority when deciding for which program they wanted to work (Kaminski & Green, 2022).

Since 2019, the average hourly wage for Kansas child care professionals has increased by 6% or just \$0.71, equating to a gross annual wage of \$25,570 (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2023b). However, the income needed to afford a three-bedroom apartment in Kansas is an estimated \$46,645, which is almost double the average annual income of a child care professional (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2023). Kansas child care professionals often earn insufficient wages to cover their basic living expenses. For example, about 20% of child care program owners or directors and 25% of child care professionals are not able to pay their bills every month (Kaminski & Green, 2022). An even larger share of each would not be able to cover a modest emergency expense.

Further, research from the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2019) has demonstrated that

care professionals (53%) are generally more likely than preschool and kindergarten teachers (43%), and far more likely than elementary teachers (21%) and the overall workforce (21%) to utilize public income support programs, such as the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Child care professionals face compounding stressors of economic insecurity and demanding working conditions that negatively affect their health and well-being more than the average person (Quinn et al., 2023), which contributes to child care workforce turnover (Hamel et al., 2023). The child care workforce has an essential role in the Kansas economy and communities, but child care professionals are inadequately compensated.



Findings

Early childhood educators and other professionals in the field are on the front lines nurturing and caring for our youngest Kansans. They are asked to do far too much for far too little pay and respect. The early childhood workforce is full of skilled, dedicated, and hardworking professionals. As crafters of supportive environments that help Kansas children thrive, and as key drivers of our economic well-being, these professionals need livable wages, adequate benefit packages, and clear pathways for growth and advancement. Agencies, workgroups, and communities across Kansas have been collaborating and innovating to strengthen and elevate the workforce for long-term sustainability.

Recruiting and Retaining an Early Childhood Workforce

Attracting professionals to the early childhood workforce—and keeping them in the field—is a nationwide challenge. In the most recent national child care workforce data, there were 100,000 fewer child care professionals than there were before the pandemic (BLS, 2023b). Kansas appears to be incrementally recovering with more child care professionals in 2023 (18,051) compared to 2021 (16,260; *All In For Kansas Kids*, 2022; DCF, 2024; KDHE, 2024; KSDE, 2023a). This has been a gradual increase, as the total number of child care professionals working in licensed settings grew by 1,286 (7.9%) between 2021 and 2022 (KDHE, 2022b) and about 500 between 2022 and 2023 (3.1%).

Although the child care workforce has slowly grown in the past two years, early childhood workforce recruitment and retention efforts have become even more challenging since the onset of the pandemic, a sentiment echoed by nearly 70% of child care administrators who responded to

a national survey (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2022). Other early child disciplines have experienced similar turnover trends. For example, over half (52%) of the early childhood home visitors who completed the Professional Well-Being and Workplace Supports Survey reported symptoms of moderate or high burnout, and fewer home visitors indicated intentions to stay in the field with a decrease from 87% to 72% between 2022 and 2023, respectively (KDHE, 2023e). Professionals leaving their current roles and leaving the field altogether result in major service disruption for children and families, which can impede program quality.

Turnover in the early childhood workforce directly affects children and families. High turnover of early educators is associated with lower outcomes for children’s cognitive and social-emotional development, compared to children whose early educators remained consistent (Grunewald et al., 2022). Nationally, early childhood professionals who receive lower wages, such as those in home-based child care programs, are more likely to leave their job or the profession altogether, compared to others in the field who earn higher wages, such as professionals in center-based programs (Grunewald et al., 2022). Child care administrators in Kansas recognize that employees are more likely to remain at their current program when adequately compensated (KU-CPPR, 2023a). Consequently, burnout, financial insecurity, and inadequate benefits are top concerns for Kansas child care administrators and professionals who intend to stay in the child care workforce for five more years (Kaminski & Green, 2022). Without long-term, public and private investments, program administrators and families cannot absorb the actual costs of safe and high-quality child care in Kansas.

Child Care Professionals Earn Lower Annual Salaries Compared to Personal Care and Service Professionals (National Averages). BLS, 2023c



The Multiplier Effect



The benefits of wage parity for child care professionals go far beyond simply elevating the early childhood workforce. A Kansas-specific analysis by Dr. Tim Green, Director of Research and Data at Openfields, estimated the return on investment of new spending in the child care sector to hire a sufficient number of professionals to meet current child care demand and pay them an annual salary of \$28,175, which would be halfway between the current average salary of a child care professional and that of a preschool teacher in Kansas.

Such new spending would have a multiplier effect on earnings of all workers in the state: **for every additional dollar paid to child care professionals, an additional 50-51 cents are earned by other workers throughout the state, yielding a direct effect of \$131 million in earnings of all workers in the state** (Green, 2021). Spillover effects of growth in the child care sector, decreased absenteeism and turnover of working parents, and higher labor force participation of parents would yield an additional \$66 million.

Investing in child care benefits the entire Kansas economy.

The importance of enriching interactions, environments, and learning experiences begins in infancy, requiring early childhood professionals who work with infants and toddlers to have child development knowledge and training similar to their peers who work with older children (Shonkoff, 2022). Despite those similar expectations, pay disparities within the early childhood workforce cause child care professionals to leave settings with infants and toddlers for slightly better wages in preschool, kindergarten, or elementary settings. Kansas child care administrators have observed this trend with staff in their programs (KU-CPPR, 2023a). Consequently, there are valid concerns about the sustainability of recruiting and retaining a highly qualified early childhood workforce to meet the demand for infant care, even without addressing the pay disparities.

Challenges recruiting and retaining highly qualified child care professionals have taken a toll on child care administrators. In a national survey, most child care administrators (e.g., owners, directors, and managers) planned to stay in the industry over the next five years, but financial insecurity and burnout are concerns for both groups (Amadon et al., 2022). Child care administrators endure much of the burden to resolve the challenges of high turnover and inadequate wages.

Multidisciplinary approaches are hallmark collaboration and teaming practices in the early childhood ecosystem. Collaboration among early childhood, health, and related

service professionals is essential for providing care and education to young children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families. Recruitment and retention challenges are also present in these other fields. A stark example is found in the Kansas MCH public health programs that experienced a decrease of 32% in full-time equivalent staff between 2020 and 2023 (KU-CPPR, 2023c). In a spring 2023 survey of MCH programs, nearly half of the staff either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that their program was adequately staffed. In another recent study, almost two in five (39%) home visiting program supervisors and administrators reported that their program was not fully staffed (KU-CPPR, 2023c). For program leadership who reported not being fully staffed, only 16% were able to fill the vacancy within four weeks; over 40% in one to three months, 24% in three to six months; and 19% in over six months.

The pandemic made efforts to recruit and retain early childhood professionals more challenging. However, temporary funding opportunities emerged to support early childhood workforce recovery in response to the pandemic. DCF, KDHE, and Child Care Aware of Kansas collaborated to distribute funding from the American Rescue Plan’s Child Care Stabilization Program to help 4,125 child care programs stay open, which ensured quality child care options for families and consistent paychecks for child care professionals (ACF, 2023). On average, each

center-based child care program received \$111,600, which was largely dedicated to staffing costs, and each home-based child care program received \$18,000, much of which helped home-based child care administrators meet their overhead expenses. These temporary investments indirectly supported 127,300 children across Kansas but were only authorized through September 2023, leaving the future stability of child care uncertain without earnest long-term financial commitments from the state and federally.

In June 2022, Governor Kelly announced an initiative to provide \$53 million in Child Care Workforce Appreciation Bonuses directly to child care professionals across Kansas. These workforce appreciation bonuses ranged from \$750 to \$2,500 and were made available to more than 20,000 child care professionals in Kansas. KDHE and DCF spearheaded this effort, funded by Supplemental Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Discretionary Funds appropriated in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). The bonuses represent a true, but temporary, bright spot for the child care system. However, only \$29,668,250 of the allocated amount was distributed because less than two-thirds (12,556) of eligible child care professionals applied for and received Appreciation Bonuses.

Child care administrators and professionals worry about these temporary programs ending and creating an even more dire child care situation (Stanford Center on Early Childhood, 2023a). While both programs are significant investments, they only briefly provide adequate support for a severely under-resourced workforce. Long-term funding solutions to provide the early childhood workforce with adequate wages are necessary for truly sustainable recruitment and retention.

Partner organizations in Kansas are exploring alternate business models to better position child care administrators for financial success. Shared Service Networks, funded by DCF and operated by Child Care Aware of Kansas, represent one model that is working to reduce administrative costs and other barriers to the child care industry long-term.



Workforce Development Initiatives

There is clear recognition of the impact that low wages and minimal benefits have on the early childhood workforce. The *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan prioritizes expanding the number of professionals entering and remaining in the workforce by articulating a comprehensive career pathway and launching a workforce registry. Three areas of current work to address tactics of the *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan are simpler avenues for training and education, incentives to develop and advance professionally, and improved coordination across funding and credentialing.

Coordinated early childhood workforce development initiatives can lead to adequate compensation, benefits, and supports for professional growth (Ullrich et al., 2017). Although compensation and benefit parity with kindergarten educators does not appear to be in the immediate future for Kansas (CSCCE, 2021), other workforce development initiatives serve as a stepping stone toward such aims. Considerable effort is underway to establish and maintain a highly qualified early childhood workforce in Kansas through the following initiatives: adopting a set of Core Competencies, establishing a Career Pathway, and developing a Workforce Registry.

The Workforce Development Advisory Group (WFDAG) consists of members from KCCTO, state agencies, non-profits, and child care professionals across the early childhood ecosystem. Tasked with ensuring that Kansas implements a high-quality, competency-based, early childhood professional development system, the WFDAG examined sets of early childhood professional core competencies to identify examples that best aligned with the current research, standards, and evidence-based practices. Efforts of this workgroup resulted in a formal recommendation, adopted by the Kansas Children's Cabinet in its role as the Early Childhood Advisory Council, to adapt the Nebraska Core Competencies for Early Childhood Professionals (Nebraska Department of Education, 2019) to meet the needs of children, families, and professionals in Kansas.

The adapted set of Core Competencies establishes foundational knowledge and skills for all early childhood professionals who provide high-quality services in Kansas. These Core Competencies help ensure that the early childhood workforce is prepared to meet the unique and evolving needs of children and families in Kansas. Adoption of new Core Competencies positions our early childhood

professionals as lifelong learners engaging in higher order thinking skills: understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The new Core Competencies are expected to be introduced in early 2024.

In alignment with the Core Competencies, an early childhood Career Pathway was recently developed to identify the sequence of stackable, portable credentials early childhood professionals need to advance in their careers. The Career Pathway includes seven levels that best reflect the sophisticated science of facilitating early learning and development of young children. The Career Pathway articulates the education, experience, and mentorship that early childhood professionals need as they progress through each of level of the pathway, ranging from Early Learner at Level 1 to Director at Level 7.



The Career Pathway was developed by the Professional Development Implementation Team (PDIT), in consultation with the WFDAG. The PDIT was comprised of leaders from three state agencies, the Kansas Children's Cabinet, DCF, and KDHE, and the two lead Kansas workforce development and technical assistance contractors: CCA-KS and Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities (KCCTO). PDIT facilitated more than 80 meetings with early childhood professionals who work in various settings: child care, infant/toddler programs, preschool, among others, to solicit input and address feedback. Based on the last rounds of feedback in the spring of 2023, adjustments were made to experience and educational requirements across each level of the

Career Pathway. The KCCTO implementation plan for the Career Pathway is under development with an expected start date in 2024.

In conjunction with the Career Pathway, Kansas state agency leaders and other partners, such as CCA-KS and KCCTO, are establishing an online workforce registry. Workforce registries generally offer professionals a place to document accomplishments, education, and experience, while also producing key datapoints about the workforce to inform policies and programs. A workforce registry also offers early childhood professionals a central location to document their goals and access high-quality professional development opportunities. Developing and implementing a workforce registry as a single, centralized portal alleviates previous challenges caused by multiple online portal interfaces. Considerable work has been done to eliminate conflicting or confusing information and to increase efficiency for tracking participation in professional development opportunities. In addition to benefiting professionals, the Workforce Registry in Kansas offers robust data on early childhood workforce recruitment and retention trends. These insights will better inform future early childhood ecosystem and workforce investments in local communities and statewide for years to come.

Currently, Kansas is one of only three states without an early childhood workforce registry (CSCCE, 2021), but not for long. Technical development on the early childhood Workforce Registry in Kansas is underway and being led by the Kansas Children's Cabinet and KCCTO, which has made significant progress towards permanently elevating and professionalizing the early childhood workforce in Kansas. State agencies, specifically KDHE and DCF, and CCA-KS are vital collaborative partners in this work. Key components of the registry include a Learning Management System (LMS), a module for professional development, and a module for quality recognition. The Registry's programming interface enables integration of relevant user-data from existing data systems across state agencies and organizations, such as KDHE's child licensed facility and affiliate/worker database (CLARIS), and KCCTO's training and credentialing database, among others. Integrating data systems across the ecosystem into one interface simplifies and modernizes the process of tracking, planning, and completing professional development and advancement. This initiative is funded by a combination of

dollars from three sources—CCDF relief, PDG, and CIF with coordination and alignment across the early childhood ecosystem. A working draft released in March 2023 outlined staffing, budget, and goals of the Registry. KDHE is also developing a new licensing database that is designed to be aligned with the Workforce Registry. Kansas plans to finalize and launch the Workforce Registry by June 2024.

To support the future of Kansas early childhood workforce initiatives, a comprehensive early childhood workforce study was initiated in November 2023 by KCCTO and the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation (OEIE) at Kansas State University. Researchers aim to reach over 3,000 participants including current and former early childhood professionals licensed in Kansas. Findings from this study are intended to inform Kansas workforce initiatives and can have broader implications for how the Kansas early childhood ecosystem supports the current and future workforce.

Child Care Program and Family Initiatives

DCF is undertaking several policy changes aimed at boosting family access to Child Care Assistance and increasing the number of programs that accept this form of payment in lieu of, or as a supplement to, family tuition payments. One of these initiatives involves using the subsidy to incentivize care that fills specific gaps in child care supply and demand. Currently, many families need care outside of traditional work hours, but few programs offer it. As of October 2023, only 249 (6.4%) licensed programs offered child care during evening hours, 45 (1.2%) provided overnight care, and 141 (3.6%) provided care during weekends (CCA-KS, 2023b).

Non-Traditional Child Care Program Options

Very few Kansas child care programs offer non-traditional hours:



To improve these numbers, DCF is working on differential payments above the Child Care Assistance maximum rates based on the provision of services during non-traditional hours. DCF is using the narrow cost analysis to better reflect the true cost of care for rate setting, as opposed to using only the market rate analysis. KDHE is also working with partners in long-term care, health care, law enforcement, and other sectors to find innovative ways to address non-traditional care.

The Child Care Quality Improvement and Support System grant from DCF allowed Child Care Aware of Kansas to establish a Shared Services Program for licensed Kansas child care programs. The goal of this initiative is to support

early childhood programs throughout Kansas to enhance the well-being, health, and development of young children while increasing program efficiency and decreasing costs. Shared Service Network Hubs offer shared administrative, substitute pools, telehealth options, and other services for networks of programs in the same region. Membership in these shared networks provides access to child care management software platforms with a range of scheduling, billing, enrollment, and reporting tools. Child Care Aware and other statewide partners have worked on developing these hubs and networks since 2022 and began operating the program in June 2023. Regional networks apply for funding and support through Child Care Aware.

Initiative Spotlight

Strengthening Our Early Childhood Workforce



Core Competencies

The Core Competencies establish foundational knowledge and skills for all early childhood professionals, which positions them as lifelong learners who engage in higher order thinking, such as understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating, in ways that are responsive to the range of children and families who they serve.

Career Pathway

The Career Pathway reflects the sophisticated science of facilitating early learning and development of young children and articulates the education, experience, and mentorship that early childhood professionals need as they progress in their careers as early childhood professionals.



Workforce Registry

The Workforce Registry will simplify and modernize the process of tracking, planning, and completing professional development and advancement, which will elevate the status of the early childhood workforce while also offering robust data on recruitment and retention trends to better inform future in early childhood investments.

Shared Service Network Hubs

Child Care Aware of Kansas and partners across the state are developing regional hubs to reduce operating costs for participating child care programs by offering a range of shared services and supports, including administrative services, substitute pools, and telehealth options.



Supporting Non-Traditional Child Care

DCF is developing a process to provide differential payments above the Child Care Assistance maximum for child care services offered during non-traditional hours to encourage child care supply outside of typical business hours.





Experiences of Children and Families

Introduction and Guiding Questions

In this section, we revisit a key finding from the initial *All In For Kansas Kids* Needs Assessment (2022a): the ability for Kansas families to have their basic needs met. To understand the experiences of children and families in Kansas, we assessed whether families have what they need to make informed decisions about, and have access to, early childhood services and supports where they live and work. The questions guiding this section are:

Are families able to meet their basic needs? What challenges do they face in doing so? What supports exist to help families meet their basic needs?

How do existing early childhood services and supports help families facilitate their child's growth, development, and well-being?

To what extent is the current network of early childhood services and supports able to anticipate the needs of Kansas children and families to ensure a desirable and sustainable future?

To what extent do families experience fragmentation across the early childhood ecosystem?

What are barriers to accessing early childhood programs and services?

Children and Families Accomplishments

KANSANS FEEL SUPPORTED

Nearly 70% of Kansans with children under 5 feel supported with the choices they have made in their personal lives.

KU-CPPR, 2023e



PROGRAM ENROLLMENT

635 more families were served by universal home visiting in fiscal year 2023 (from 2,054 to 2,679).



2,431 more preschool students were enrolled in the 2022-2023 school year.

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS

The Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ)* is now utilized by **286 Kansas public school districts and 175 other registered programs.**

95,000+ screenings

for both the ASQ-3 (all developmental domains) and ASQ:SE-2 (social-emotional domain) were completed in 2023.



**An online screening tool to assess children's developmental progress.*

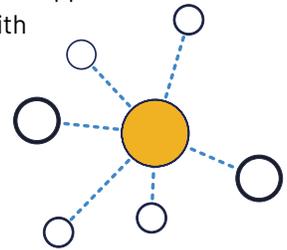
FAMILY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

1-800-CHILDREN had

81,061 contacts

in 2023, an increase from 53,749 in 2021.

1-800-CHILDREN is the state's centralized access point for services and supports that may benefit families with children under 18 years old. Families can be connected to all early childhood services and supports through this resource.



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



The percentage of **birthing mothers who do not have a high school diploma has decreased by 5.1%** over the past decade (from 15.6% in 2011 to 10.5% in 2021).
KAC, 2023

KEY OUTCOMES

Kansas is performing **above the national median in key outcome measures**

largely because of early childhood services and supports.



90.1%

Access to prenatal care.

98.6%

Childhood food security.

42.6%

Infants and toddlers read to daily by family.

PN-3, 2023

PART C SERVICES

Infants and toddlers with documented disabilities or developmental delays meet federal eligibility criteria for Part C early intervention, but states have discretion to extend eligibility to children considered at-risk for disabilities (34 CFR §303.21).

Unfortunately, **Kansas children considered at-risk for disabilities are not eligible for early intervention services** because the state has not yet extended eligibility beyond the minimum federal requirements.

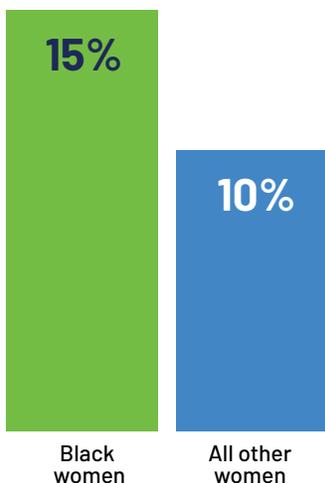


HEALTH CARE

The **preterm birth rate for Black women in Kansas is about 1.5 times higher** compared to all other women in Kansas.

KDHE, 2019

March of Dimes, 2022



Black infants

White infants

Similarly, the **infant mortality rate among Black infants per 1,000 live births in Kansas is three times higher** than White infants. *KDHE, 2022a*

BASIC NEEDS

About **39%** of Kansas households cannot afford basic needs because their wages are too low: 12% of households live at or below 100% federal poverty level (FPL), which is \$30,000 annual income for a family of four, and an additional 27% of households earn above 100% FPL but still struggle to afford basic needs. *United for ALICE, 2023*



CHILD CARE

Child care remains unaffordable for most Kansas families. For a Kansas family of four earning a median household income of \$64,521, **child care for an infant and a four-year-old costs almost one-third (31%) of their annual income.**

U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b



NAVIGATION CHALLENGES

Early childhood **leadership and workforce turnover** due to retirement, burnout, and low wages makes ecosystem navigation more challenging for families.

*Grunewald et al., 2022;
KDHE & KU-CPPR, 2021; KU-CPPR, 2023c*

Children and Families Summary Findings

Findings related to experiences of Kansas children and families were developed through in-depth review of existing data and relevant reports (see [Introduction Section](#)), collection of perspectives from across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem, and data synthesis of these important yet distinct insights.

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.**



The State of Children and Families in Kansas

Experiences of children and families are shaped by who they are, where they live and work, and what services and supports they might need. Here, we discuss the current state of children and families in Kansas. Though age ranges included in “early childhood” vary depending on context, we generally focus on children birth to five-years-old and have primarily incorporated sources that also focus on this age range.

Many types of family formations exist and are unique to each family: who makes up a family, how many members are in the family, and who has what role(s) in the family. Regardless of their makeup, families can provide children with safe, healthy, and loving environments, promote early learning and development, and foster well-being. To fulfill these functions, families often utilize state and local early childhood services and supports.

Children Under 6

From birth through their fifth year, young children’s interactions and opportunities strongly influence their long-term health, well-being, and success later in life. The first five years of every child’s life are crucial because early learning and development set the foundation for one’s experiences across the lifespan:



Relationships

A child’s ability to engage in kind and caring interactions and relationships with others forms during infancy through strong child-caregiver attachment and sustains across their lifespan. *Dahl & Paulus, 2019; Denault et al., 2023*



Development

A child’s cognitive (e.g., reasoning, critical thinking, and self-regulation) and socio-emotional (e.g., self-awareness, social-awareness, relationship-building) skill development supported in high-quality educational settings during preschool (ages three- to four-years old) are associated with positive educational attainment and earnings in adulthood. *Bustamante et al., 2022*



Well-Being

A child’s physical and mental well-being depend on access to nutritious food for the body and brain to develop and as a safeguard against illness and infection, which sustain physical and mental longevity through adulthood. *Roth et al., 2017*



Self-Regulation

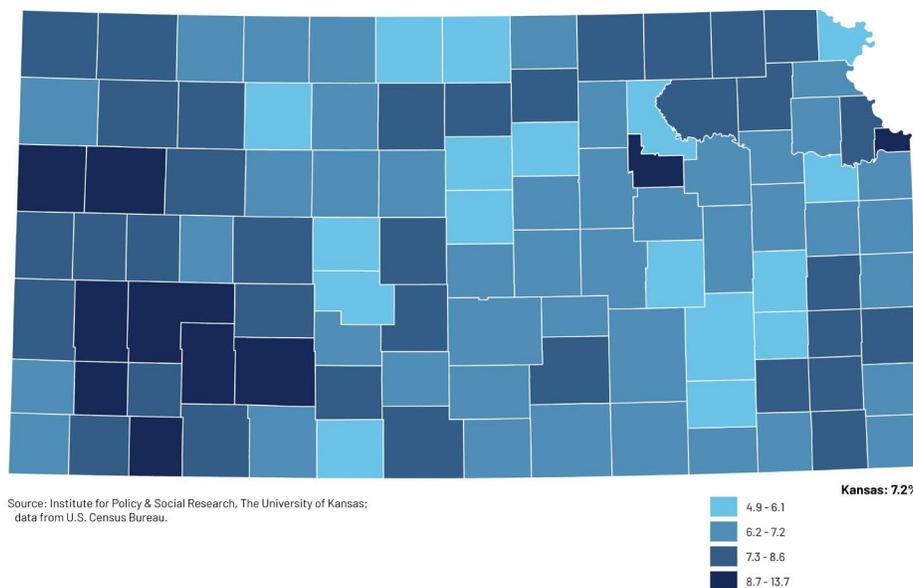
A child’s ability to self-regulate or control their impulses in early childhood can predict their achievement, interpersonal relationships, mental health, and healthy habits in adulthood. *Robson et al., 2020*

Comprehensive supports throughout a child’s first five years of life are highly cost beneficial (Hahn & Barnett, 2023). Because early childhood development is incremental and cumulative, meaning that skills are built upon each other over time, support provided to young children and their families can mitigate the need for more costly interventions across the rest of the lifespan, such as special education and related services, foster care, intensive health care, and incarceration. In other words, investing in comprehensive early childhood services and supports is a cost-effective, long-term solution to improving the lives and well-being of young children and families now and in the future. The state of young Kansans matters because our children today will become the workforce, leaders, neighbors, and parents of tomorrow.

Young children thrive when they experience safe and stable environments, responsive and nurturing child-caregiver relationships, and meaningful learning opportunities that are developmentally appropriate (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022). Thriving conditions are best supported by multifaceted intervention approaches that directly and indirectly support children and families because all developmental domains are interrelated and all social contexts that children and families interact with mutually influence each other (Britto et al., 2017). In other words, an efficient and effective ecosystem of supports and services is essential for children, families, and communities to thrive (Miller et al., 2022).

To understand how young children might experience their early years, we must first understand general population trends across Kansas and what implications these trends might have on the state now and in the future. An estimated 212,462 children under 6 live in Kansas, which is about 7% of total population of Kansas (U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2022b). [Figure 5](#) shows the percentage of children under 6 years of age across Kansas counties.

Figure 5. Percent of Population Under 6 in Kansas By County, 2022

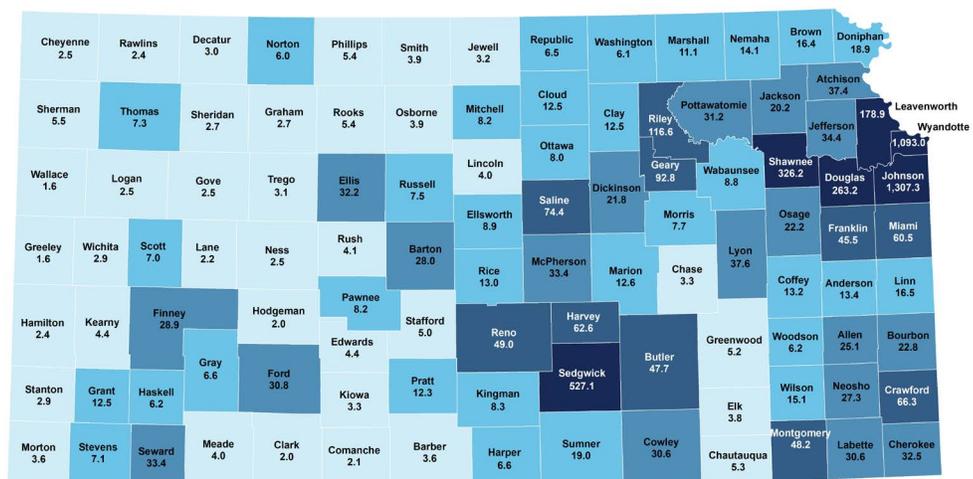


Although the population of children under 6 years old in Kansas is slightly higher than the national average (USCB, 2022b), the overall birth rate in Kansas is declining. According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE; 2023d), there were a total of 34,376 births to Kansas resident mothers in 2022, which is a slight decrease of 0.9% from 2021. Seven counties, each with over 800 births, accounted for almost 60% of births in 2022: six urban counties (Douglas, Johnson, Leavenworth, Sedgwick, Shawnee, and Wyandotte) and one semi-urban county (Geary). Far more children live in urban, semi-urban, and densely populated rural counties (88.1%) compared to children who live in rural and frontier counties (11.9%; USCB, 2022a), which poses considerable challenges for coordinating and providing high-quality early childhood services and supports that are individualized for each child and their family.

The challenge of relatively small numbers of children dispersed across more space often leads to large geographic service areas with few early intervention, early childhood special education, and other specialized professionals.



Figure 6. Population Density Classifications in Kansas by County, 2022



Source: Institute for Policy & Social Research, The University of Kansas; data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2022.

Population Density by Classification*
(persons per square mile)

State: 35.9

- Frontier (less than 6.0 ppsm)
- Rural (6.1 - 19.9 ppsm)
- Densely-settled Rural (20.0 - 39.9 ppsm)
- Semi-Urban (40.0 - 149.9 ppsm)
- Urban (150.0 or more ppsm)

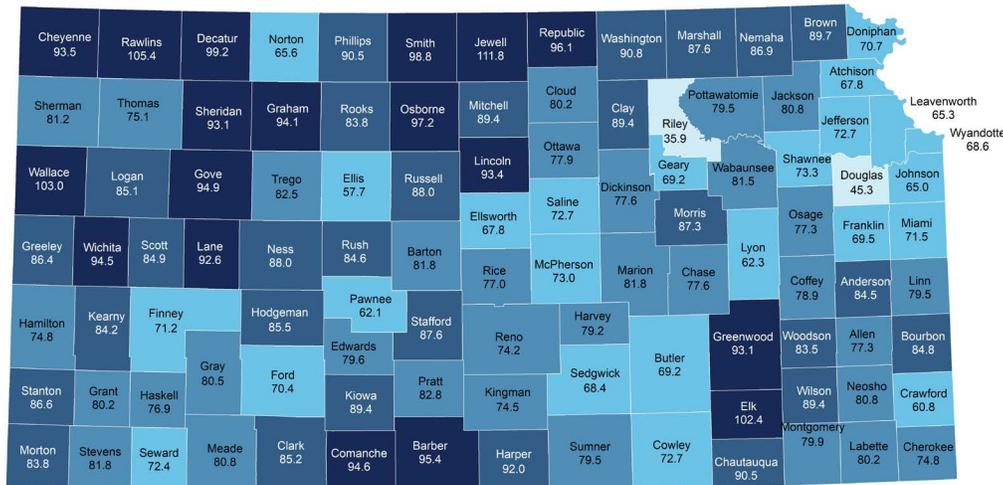
* Kansas Department of Health and Environment classifications.

Table 7. Estimated Number of Children Under 6 by Kansas Region (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a)

Region	General population (Count)	Population of children under 6 (Count)	Total population of children under 6 (%)
Frontier	108,699	7,579	3.6
Rural	249,906	17,538	8.3
Densely Settled Rural	432,858	32,956	15.5
Semi-Urban	454,885	32,052	15.1
Urban	1,690,802	122,337	57.6
Total	2,937,150	212,462	100

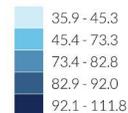
The decline in birth rates in Kansas mirrors national trends (Brown, 2021). Although the Kansas birth rate decline from year to year seems relatively small, this gradual decrease adds up over time. The birth rate has markedly decreased by over 17% in the past 15 years (KDHE, 2023d). The drop in the overall birth rate is compounded with declining populations in rural and Western Kansas and an overall aging population (KAC, 2023). A negative population growth rate, in part due to the decreasing birth rate, will impact Kansas in the near future and long-term (KAC, 2023). A decreasing population has serious implications for economic and social well-being in Kansas. Fewer births can lead to a smaller yet more expensive labor market, which can reduce the size and quantity of businesses and industries, as well as number of consumers, contributing to the state’s economy (Chapman, 2022). In turn, younger generations with smaller populations relative to older generations may become less productive because the workforce must pivot, at least in part, to caring for an aging population rather than contributing to production for the state, national, or global markets.

Figure 7. Dependent Population per 100 People Age 18 to 64 in Kansas by County, 2022.



Source: Institute for Policy & Social Research, The University of Kansas; data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2022 Population Estimates.

Dependent population includes people under 18 and over 64.



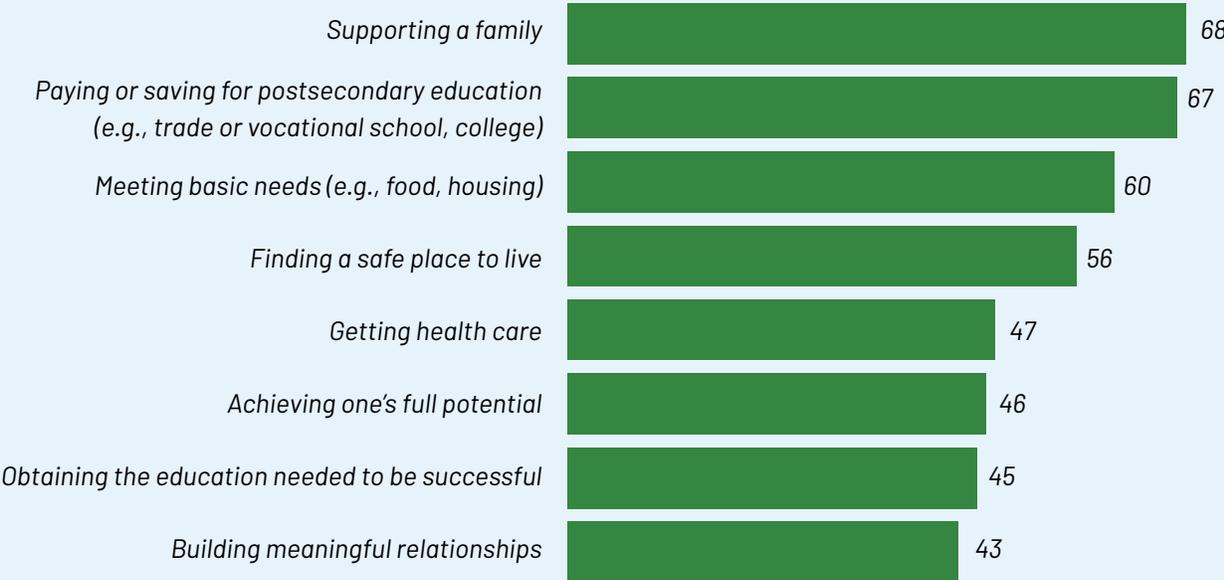
Additionally, fewer births also means that families will be smaller and there will be fewer families over time. Because family members and other relatives often serve as long-term sources of stability, support, and socialization, individuals may become more lonely, isolated, self-interested (Joint Economic Committee, 2022). In the near future and as a single consideration, the declining birth rate may seem nominal, but over time and contextualized with other considerations, a sub-replacement birth rate will drastically decrease the population in Kansas and change industries, businesses, and communities across the state.

There is little data currently available to pinpoint the reason for this decline in Kansas or nationally. However, in a study of almost 10,000 U.S. adults with and without children, more than half (56%) of respondents indicated that they did not want to have more children, or any at all (Brown, 2021). Among study participants aged 18 to 49 who were not parents, almost half (44%) stated that they were unlikely to have children in the future, which is a 7% increase from the 37% of respondents who echoed this

sentiment in the 2018 survey (Brown, 2021). Several reasons influenced the decision to not have children in the future. Some influences include financial (e.g., cost of child care; Brown, 2021; Grose, 2023; Heggeness, 2021) as well as medical reasons (Brown, 2021). Other reasons indicated in the national survey included not having a partner, the current state of the world, and climate change. Perceptions about raising a family in Kansas vary according to age. The Healthy Kansas Community Perceptions survey, which interviewed almost 1,500 Kansans, revealed a correlation between age and perceptions about raising children: Respondents over age 65 had more positive perceptions, while the respondents between ages 18 and 24 had the least positive perceptions (KDHE, 2022c). Although more research is needed to identify specific causes and correlations between a family's context and their choice to not have children in the future, research strongly suggests that families who experience complex challenges are often discouraged from having children.

Figure 8. Kansan Survey Respondents Thinking About Their Future. *n* = 1,426

When Kansans were asked to envision future experiences, a substantial number of survey respondents expressed that the following aspects of life would become more difficult:



KDHE, 2022c

Geography Effects

Families' experiences are largely shaped by where they live and work. As a Midwestern state, Kansas comprises communities that range from urban to frontier, and everything in between. Rural communities in Kansas often support agriculture and related sectors of the economy (Kansas Department of Agriculture [KDA], 2023b). Conversely, urban and semi-urban communities in Kansas often have higher concentrations of corporate manufacturing sectors. Each Kansas community has unique resources, strengths, and challenges based on its geographical location, which influences families' lived experiences.

Almost 90%
of Kansas children live in more populated areas of Kansas. These include urban, semi-urban, and densely settled rural counties. USCB, 2022a

Many Kansas families live near infrastructure and resources necessary to meet basic needs, such as grocery stores, health care providers, and educational settings. However, not all families can afford essentials, such as food and shelter, which can impede family members' attainment of higher-order needs, such as establishing a sense of belonging, developing self-esteem, and contributing to society (Victoria et al., 2022). Families in urban Kansas communities often live in areas considered food deserts that characterize a community's limited access to healthy and affordable food (Kansas Health Institute [KHI], 2022). For example, Central Topeka is considered a food desert with the highest rates of food insecurity (about 29%) and low-income households (about 38%) in Shawnee County (KHI, 2022). Similar patterns have been found in other urban areas, such as Wichita and Kansas City, smaller communities, such as Salina and Dodge City, and frontier regions, such as Elk and Sherman Counties (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2019). While sufficient income helps families meet their basic needs, there are additional considerations that make families' abilities to meet basic needs more complex and nuanced.

Families who live in rural and urban areas may experience increased—though different—barriers to meeting their basic needs. Families in rural areas of Kansas historically earn lower wages and experience higher rates of poverty (Kansas Children's Cabinet & KU-CPPR, 2017). Additionally, families who live in less populated areas and whose young children require specialized care and supports often experience more gaps in support due to shortages of professionals, resources, and innovations necessary to sustain rural service provision. Families who live in urban areas also experience poverty and barriers meeting basic needs, though their experiences will likely differ from families in rural areas. Urban areas generally have higher concentrations of professionals and resources available to support children and families. However, urban areas often experience high costs of living and basic needs, which requires families to spend more of their income to afford basic needs (Institute of Policy & Research, 2023). Whether families live in rural or urban communities, they can experience unique circumstances because of where they live.

Extreme Weather Effects

Global temperatures continue to climb and 2023 was reported to be the warmest year in history since official records began in 1880 (National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA], 2024; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], 2024). Across the country, children and families are experiencing more frequent and extreme weather events (Jay et al., 2023). Extreme weather affects early childhood development and health. In particular, Harvard's Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment (2023) highlighted ways in which extreme heat compromises young children's brain and body development, such as poor sleep and learning loss. Short-term developmental outcomes to prolonged extreme heat exposure can result in decreased cognitive and emotional functioning, seizures, muscle deterioration, and a compromised immune system, among others. Over time, these short-term outcomes reduce children's abilities to endure future extreme heat exposure and have lasting effects including increased risk for significant medical conditions, such as heart, liver, and kidney failure.

In Kansas, these events include record-high temperatures, increased risk of drought, and stronger and more prevalent storms (McPherson et al., 2023; National Weather Service, 2023). By 2050, Kansas is expected to have four times as many days over 100 degrees as were recorded in 2016 (KDHE, 2022c). With natural disasters and extreme weather becoming more prevalent, families who earn less than a livable wage are disproportionately affected due to out-of-pocket costs for repairs and possible disruptions to work, school, and transportation (Hallegatte et al., 2020). Kansas children and families will experience these events differently depending on compounding influences, such as family income, location, and race/ethnicity, which will shape their long-term outcomes.

Over the last year, The Early Years Climate Action Task Force, a group of 20 early years leaders, climate leaders, researchers, medical professionals, parents, philanthropists, and others came together to create a plan. They held listening sessions to learn more about the impacts of climate change on young children and explored opportunities to support young children, their families, and the programs that serve them in a context of increasingly severe weather events. The U.S. Early Years Climate Action Plan (Capita & The Aspen Institute, 2023) recommends collaborations among policymakers, early childhood professionals, business, philanthropy, and

researchers to effectively support children and families, child- and family-facing programs, and communities.

Based on these recommendations, state policymakers in Kansas have an opportunity to assess and update resources and tools to determine climate vulnerability and risk to families with young children. State policymakers can also leverage policy to ensure that early childhood programs are prepared to experience extreme weather events and are protected from them when possible. Local policymakers should reach out to families to include them in planning, especially when planning for climate-resilient neighborhoods and spaces. Finally, early childhood professionals should plan for building climate resilience into their services. For example, early childhood administrators should begin to consider the safety and quality of their facilities needed to endure extreme weather events, consider how they will warn and guide children and families during extreme weather events, and integrate training to prepare for this type of disruption into their professional development plans (Early Childhood Scientific Council on Equity and the Environment, 2023; Capita & The Aspen Institute, 2023). Following through with these recommendations can help ensure a future where families will stay and grow in Kansas, despite facing the impacts of extreme weather events.



The Future of Farming and Ranching Families in Kansas

Agriculture and related sectors are central to the Kansas economy and its communities.



87.5%
of Kansas is farmland,
occupying 45,759,319 acres.
KDA, 2023b



Farming crops and livestock
annually earns Kansans an estimated
\$81.2 billion.
KDA, 2023c

253,614

Kansans are
employed by farming.
KDA, 2023c



14%
of the Gross Regional
Product is produced
by Kansas farms.
KDA, 2023c



With cattle and grains as the
most common products raised
and grown in Kansas, **the state's
agriculture production is also
crucial to national and global
markets and societies.** *KDA, 2023a*



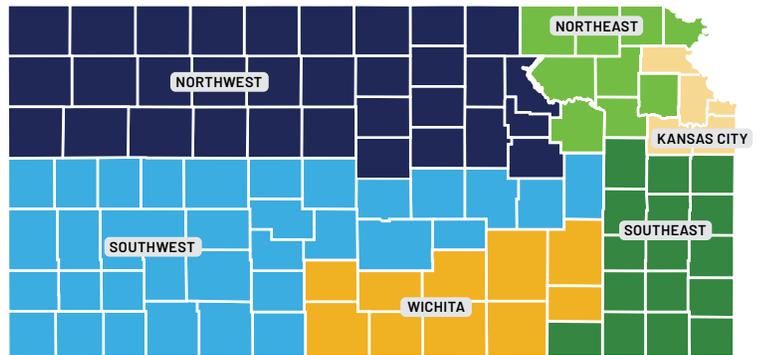
84.6%
of agriculture production
in Kansas is **family-owned
and family-operated.**
USDA, 2019

Families are the backbone of agriculture production in Kansas. A majority (84.6%) of production is family-owned and -operated, but Kansas farmers are an average age of 58 (U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2019). Farming families function best when they have established connections and trust within their family units, which contribute to their short-term productivity and intergenerational succession (Bell, 2019). However, geographical barriers that uniquely interfere with rural families meeting their basic needs, such as inaccessible or unavailable child care and health care, can detract from families' farming production. Additionally, agriculture-related occupations often experience a variety of stressors, such as unpredictable weather, heavy workloads, and financial burdens, which can take a toll on individual and family mental health and well-being. To support positive outcomes for farmers, ranchers, and their families, [Kansas Ag Stress Resources](#) brings awareness to these unique challenges and offers a range of supports. Despite available supports, the reality is that farmers and ranchers are almost twice as likely to die by suicide compared to other occupations (Peterson et al., 2020).

Rural farming and ranching families are essential to the Kansas economy and its communities, yet face complex challenges due to their geography and occupational conditions. With negative population growth rates influenced by birth rates, an aging population, and out-of-state migration (KAC, 2023), there is growing concern for the future of rural farming and ranching families in Kansas. Over the next few decades, the declining birth rate, limited resources in rural communities, and increasing occupational challenges may converge in ways that make farming and ranching families scarce in Kansas. A comprehensive early childhood ecosystem can implement innovative solutions to provide high-quality child care and health care in ways that improve the lives of children and families in rural Kansas, as well as the Kansas economy as a whole.

Regional Profiles

While most of the findings of this Needs Assessment are applicable throughout the state, **regional and community variations shape how families access and experience services.** Drawing on data from the Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard and other publicly available sources, we compiled key indicators by Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) regions into profiles to help contextualize experiences of Kansas families with young children as they vary across regions.



Out of the six DCF regions, four regions had populations between 269,000 to 377,000 and contained most of the state’s rural and frontier counties. The Kansas City and Wichita regions were the most populated at about three- and two-times as many people as other regions, respectively. Across all regions, the population of children under age 6 was generally proportionate, making up about 7% of the total population. In each region, unduplicated counts of children who participated in services across the early childhood ecosystem ranged from about one-third to one-half of all children. Kansas City and Wichita were two of the three regions with the lowest percentages of children served by the early childhood ecosystem.

Families’ access to health care professionals differed across regions. For example, health care professionals in the Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast regions were scarce, ranging from 16 to 36 pediatricians and three to nine doulas per region. Across all regions, most pediatricians and doulas congregated in counties with relatively dense populations. In three regions, more than half of the region’s pediatricians were in a single county. At least one-third to one-half each region’s doulas were in a single county.

The population of Kansans who lived below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) ranged from 11% to 13.7% across all regions except for Kansas City with 8.8%. The national rate of the population experiencing poverty was 11.5% (USCB, 2023b). Although proportionately more households in the Kansas City area lived above the FPL, costs for basic needs were often higher in urban and semi-urban areas. Rates of single mothers with young children, children enrolled in nursery/preschool, and children enrolled in kindergarten who lived below 100% FPL were consistent across regions, making up about 0.1% to 0.3% of each regional population.

The regional profiles on the following pages display data related to key demographics, the number of children served by the early childhood system, community resources, and poverty. Data sources and source notes are provided in the box below.

Sources/Notes

Key Demographic/Poverty Indicators Indicators are estimates that represent the most recent available data collected between 2018 and 2022 for the American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau.

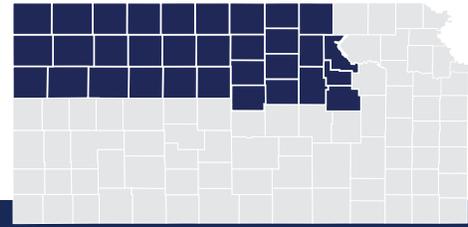
Children Served by the Early Childhood System Numbers were based on 2023 data provided by the the Kansas Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard. Region-level counts of children served by the early childhood system and children served in child care, home visiting, and Part C programs are provided for each region. Region-level data were limited for children served in PreK and were excluded from these counts.

Parks Numbers were based on data collected in 2018 by openICPSR National Neighborhood Data Archive (NaNDA).

Farmers Markets Numbers were based on data collected in 2018 by USDA ERS Food Environment Atlas.

Pediatricians/Midwives and Doulas Numbers were based on data collected in 2022 by National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES).

NORTHWEST REGION



Key Demographics

Total population	Households with children under 18	Children under 6	Women in the workforce who have given birth in the last year
331,980	37,834	24,872	2,781

Children Served by the Early Childhood System

All services <i>48.6% of children under 6</i>	Child care	Home visiting	Part C
12,087	8,404	1,535	1,532

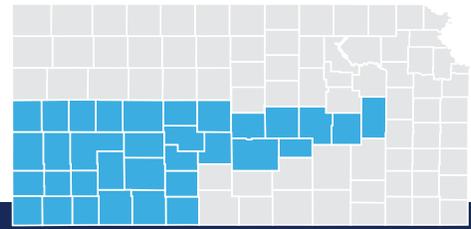
Community Resources

	 Parks	 Farmers markets	 Pediatricians	 Midwives & doulas
Total	134	24	30	9
Minimum/county	0	0	0	0
Maximum/county	24	3	15	3

Poverty *Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

People living below 100% FPL		Regional population count	Percent of regional population
13.7%	Indicator		
Households receiving SNAP (Food Stamps)	Single mothers below 100% FPL with children under 5	895	0.3%
17,301	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in nursery or preschool	937	0.3%
	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in kindergarten	678	0.2%

SOUTHWEST REGION



Key Demographics

Total population	Households with children under 18	Children under 6	Women in the workforce who have given birth in the last year
376,009	44,336	28,813	3,567

Children Served by the Early Childhood System

All services <i>37.3% of children under 6</i>	Child care	Home visiting	Part C
10,748	7,412	1,431	1,632

Community Resources

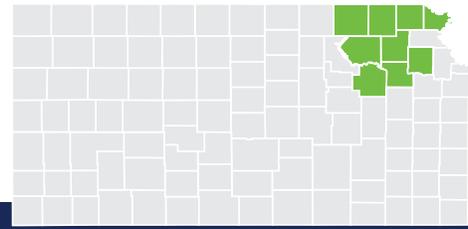


	Parks	Farmers markets	Pediatricians	Midwives & doulas
Total	169	23	35	6
Minimum/county	0	0	0	0
Maximum/county	27	3	9	2

Poverty *Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

People living below 100% FPL		Regional population count	Percent of regional population
11.4%	Indicator		
Households receiving SNAP (Food Stamps)	Single mothers below 100% FPL with children under 5	1,108	0.3%
39,046	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in nursery or preschool	625	0.2%
	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in kindergarten	643	0.2%

NORTHEAST REGION



Key Demographics

Total population	Households with children under 18	Children under 6	Women in the workforce who have given birth in the last year
279,910	32,581	20,560	2,343

Children Served by the Early Childhood System

All services <i>48% of children under 6</i>	Child care	Home visiting	Part C
9,870	6,307	1,693	1,335

Community Resources

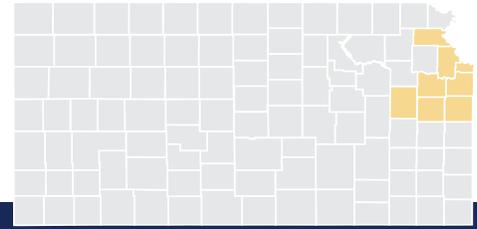


	Parks	Farmers markets	Pediatricians	Midwives & doulas
Total	144	13	36	6
Minimum/county	0	0	0	0
Maximum/county	105	6	35	3

Poverty *Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

People living below 100% FPL		Regional population count	Percent of regional population
11.0%	Indicator		
Households receiving SNAP (Food Stamps)	Single mothers below 100% FPL with children under 5	496	0.2%
5,696	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in nursery or preschool	266	0.1%
	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in kindergarten	475	0.2%

KANSAS CITY METRO REGION



Key Demographics

Total population	Households with children under 18	Children under 6	Women in the workforce who have given birth in the last year
996,184	121,999	73,486	9,363

Children Served by the Early Childhood System

All services <i>41.3% of children under 6</i>	Child care	Home visiting	Part C
30,367	23,309	3,341	3,707

Community Resources



Parks



Farmers markets



Pediatricians



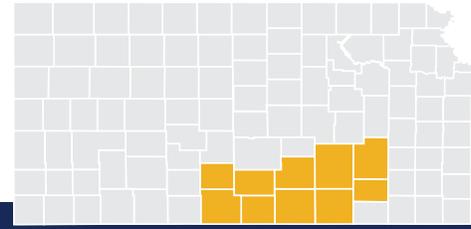
Midwives & doulas

Total	584	22	186	35
Minimum/county	12	1	0	1
Maximum/county	386	9	111	18

Poverty *Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

People living below 100% FPL		8.8%
Households receiving SNAP (Food Stamps)		936
Indicator	Regional population count	Percent of regional population
Single mothers below 100% FPL with children under 5	1,624	0.2%
Children below 100% FPL enrolled in nursery or preschool	1,307	0.1%
Children below 100% FPL enrolled in kindergarten	1,308	0.1%

WICHITA REGION



Key Demographics

Total population	Households with children under 18	Children under 6	Women in the workforce who have given birth in the last year
682,032	82,720	51,521	6,570

Children Served by the Early Childhood System

All services <i>33.2% of children under 6</i>	Child care	Home visiting	Part C
17,127	13,030	1,586	2,433

Community Resources

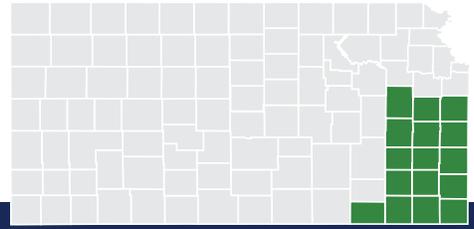


	Parks	Farmers markets	Pediatricians	Midwives & doulas
Total	340	18	159	18
Minimum/county	0	0	0	0
Maximum/county	255	8	154	16

Poverty *Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

People living below 100% FPL		Regional population count	Percent of regional population
12.8%	Indicator		
Households receiving SNAP (Food Stamps)	Single mothers below 100% FPL with children under 5	1,437	0.2%
4,797	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in nursery or preschool	1,421	0.2%
	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in kindergarten	1,270	0.2%

SOUTHEAST REGION



Key Demographics

Total population	Households with children under 18	Children under 6	Women in the workforce who have given birth in the last year
269,807	31,145	19,320	1,885

Children Served by the Early Childhood System

All services <i>42.4% of children under 6</i>	Child care	Home visiting	Part C
8,196	5,096	1,927	952

Community Resources

	 Parks	 Farmers markets	 Pediatricians	 Midwives & doulas
Total	106	19	16	3
Minimum/county	0	0	0	0
Maximum/county	16	3	7	2

Poverty *Federal Poverty Level (FPL)*

People living below 100% FPL		Regional population count	Percent of regional population
13.3%	Indicator		
Households receiving SNAP (Food Stamps)	Single mothers below 100% FPL with children under 5	509	0.2%
12,081	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in nursery or preschool	763	0.3%
	Children below 100% FPL enrolled in kindergarten	511	0.2%

Findings

Meeting Basic Needs

Meeting basic needs is essential for children and families—and all Kansans—to live meaningful lives and contribute to society. Basic needs include food, housing, health care, child care, transportation, technology, and other unanticipated living costs.

In Kansas, 39% of households cannot afford to meet their basic needs: 12% of households live at or below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL), which is less than \$30,000 annual income for a family of four, and an additional 27% of households earn above 100% FPL but still struggle to afford at least some of their basic needs (United for ALICE, 2023). [Table 8](#) provides an overview of FPL income thresholds on family size in 2023. Although a family of four earning a \$50,000 annual income lives above 100% FPL, the availability and cost of basic needs shapes the family’s ability to meet these needs. Where Kansans live influences

how much their basic needs cost (KDHE, 2022c). [Table 9](#) provides an overview of children who live below 100% FPL across each type of geographic region in Kansas.

Table 8. 2023 Federal Poverty Guidelines at 100% Federal Poverty Level by Family Size. HHS, 2023

Family Size	Annual Pre-Tax Income
1	\$14,580
2	\$19,720
3	\$24,860
4	\$30,000
5	\$35,140

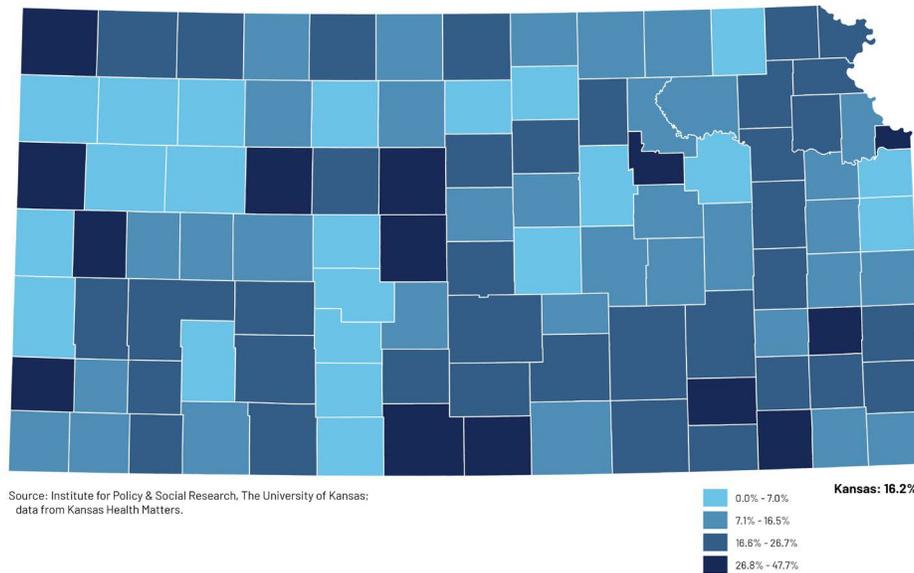
Note: Add \$5,140 for each extra person.

Table 9. Children Whose Families Live Below 100% Federal Poverty Level by Region. USCB, 2022a

Region	Total children under 6 who live below 100% FPL	Percentage of children under 6 who live below 100% FPL in Region
Frontier	1,173	3.4%
Rural	2,548	7.4%
Densely Settled Rural	6,309	18.3%
Semi-Urban	5,948	17.4%
Urban	18,449	53.6%
Total	34,427	100.0%

Note. A family of four who lives at 100% FPL earned an annual income of \$30,000 in 2023 (HHS, 2023).

Figure 9. Percent of Children Under 5 in Poverty in Kansas by County, 2017-2021



Kansas families who live in urban counties may earn higher wages, leading to higher annual income, but they may experience higher cost of living in more densely populated areas compared to rural locales. Take differences between the costs of living in Wyandotte (urban) and Ottawa (rural) Counties for example: Wyandotte County’s median household annual income in 2021 was \$52,366, which was about 6.3% higher than Ottawa County’s median household annual income of \$49,250 (USCB, 2022a). However, the fair market rent rate, which includes the cost of shelter plus utilities per month, for a three-bedroom unit considered safe and suitable for living was \$1,530 in Wyandotte County, which was almost 50% more than the fair market rent rate of \$1,022 for equivalent shelter and utilities in Ottawa County (USCB, 2022a). In other words, the spending-to-income ratio may differ for each family across Kansas because where they live influences the cost of goods, services, and basic needs.

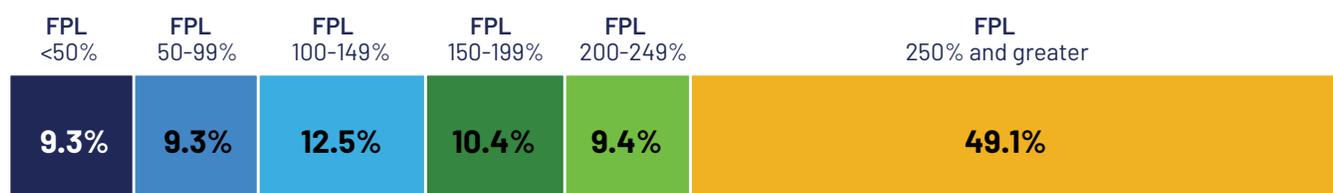
Though the cost of living varies from one Kansas community to another, there is one constant across the state: the minimum hourly wage in Kansas is \$7.25 (Kansas Department of Labor [KDOL], 2023). Minimum wage does not equate to a livable income even when

working full-time in 2023. Instead, a livable wage for a family of four with two parents working full-time is \$23.24 per hour per working parent (Glasmeier, 2023). A survival budget for a family with two adults, one infant, and one preschool-aged child in Kansas requires a combined hourly wage of \$27.40 (United for ALICE, 2023), which is nearly double the income that two adults would earn working full-time at minimum wage. Increasing costs of living while raising young children create persistent, interrelated challenges for many Kansas families.

Almost 20%
of children under age 6 across all geographic regions in Kansas live below 100% FPL.

50.9% *of Kansas children live in families who struggle to afford at least some of their basic needs. USCB, 2022a*

Figure 10. Over Half of Kansas Children Under 6 Live Below 250% FPL. USCB, 2022a



Living at or below the poverty level, which is less than \$30,000 for a family of four, is disparately experienced across racial and ethnic categories. According to data from 2022 synthesized from the American Community Surveys, the poverty rate for Black (20.7%) and Hispanic (20.6%) Kansans was double the rate of White Kansans (10%; KFF, 2023a). Kansans categorized in the dataset as American Indian/Alaska Native (17.6%) and Multiple Races (16.4%) also experienced higher poverty rates, whereas Kansans who identified as Asian/Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (9.8%) experienced slightly lower poverty rates compared to Kansas who were White (KFF, 2023a).

Table 10. Percentage of Kansas Population by Race/Ethnicity and Region. USCB, 2022b

Race/ethnicity	Frontier	Rural	Densely Settled Rural	Semi-Urban	Urban	Total Kansas
Hispanic, any race	16.3%	13.3%	29.0%	14.5%	20.2%	20.0%
White alone	92.5%	91.9%	88.1%	82.5%	76.0%	80.8%
Black or African American only	1.1%	1.3%	2.8%	5.6%	10.5%	7.5%
Native American only	1.1%	1.8%	1.9%	1.2%	1.1%	1.3%
Asian or Pacific Islander only	0.5%	0.6%	1.6%	2.4%	4.7%	3.4%
Two or more races	4.8%	4.5%	5.5%	8.4%	7.7%	7.1%

Note. Total percentages by region exceed 100% due to data collection and measurement limitations. The U.S. Census Bureau considers "Hispanic, any race" an ethnicity, which differs from race. Regional totals add up to 100% +/- 0.1% based on racial category percentages.

Families of color with young children disproportionately experience barriers in their daily lives. For example, Indigenous and Black families in Kansas are more likely to have higher spending-to-income ratios and be labeled with disabilities compared to White families (USCB, 2022a). Kansas children of color are also disproportionately represented in the child welfare system, where Black and Indigenous children are overrepresented at nearly twice the rate of White children in foster care (DCF, 2021). These disparities suggest that access to basic needs, such as food, housing, and health care, is even more limited for Kansans of color.

When a family's basic needs are unmet, all family members can experience distress, including children (Sojourner, 2023; Stanford Center on Early Childhood, 2023; United for ALICE, 2023). When parents and caregivers experience high stress levels, they often experience challenges engaging in warm, responsive interactions and relationships with their children (Fields et al., 2021). Because children's early years set the foundation for their social-emotional development, which includes skills needed to engage in emotional regulation and interpersonal connections, positive attachment to family members is essential for young children (Doyle & Cicchetti, 2017). Positive interactions and relationships in early childhood contribute to positive long-term outcomes, whereas negative or absent interactions and relationships in early childhood can have the opposite effect. For these reasons, meeting the family's basic needs is foundational to early learning, which leads to improved long-term outcomes for children and families.



Food and Nutrition

While all basic needs function together in complex ways that shape children and families' lived experiences, food and nutrition are perhaps the most essential needs because they sustain human life. Food insecurity is connected to poorer quality diet, which can lead children and families to experience persistent health challenges, such as hypertension and diabetes, overall poorer health, and lower quality of life compared to those who have food security and nutritious diet (Keith-Jennings et al., 2019).

Access to healthful food improves one's ability to meet other basic needs related to health (Bitler & Seifoddini, 2019) and housing (Lee et al., 2021). Because basic needs are interrelated, they have compounding effects on experiences of children and families over time. For example, food security coupled with housing stability positively contribute to adolescent mental health, whereas challenges accessing one or both of these basic needs can negatively impact adolescent mental health (Hattem et al., 2020). More broadly, food security facilitates immediate benefits, such as decreased hospitalizations and school absences based on monthly counts, as well as long-term benefits, such as lower crime rates and increased educational attainment and lifetime earnings based on cohort and longitudinal studies (Bitler & Seifoddini, 2019). Adequate food and nutrition are essential for positive outcomes across the lifespan.

Benefit programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provide eligible individuals and families with financial assistance to obtain food and nutrition. These programs promote food security via ongoing support to qualifying families, freeing up some of families' net income to be reallocated to attain other basic needs. On average, 10.2% of Kansas households were food insecure between 2019-2021 (USDA, 2022). Single women and men headed households in Kansas are experiencing a higher rate of food insecurity (29% and 15%, respectively) than the national average (KDHE, 2022c). The most recent available data indicates that about 95,000 Kansas households participated in food assistance programs during fiscal year 2023, which included about 107,000 adults and 83,000 children (DCF, 2023b).

Food security in Kansas has improved at statistically significant rates, both recently and in the past decade: Overall, the number of Kansas households considered to be experiencing "low" or "very low" food insecurity has been minimized by about one-quarter from 12.5% during 2017-19 to 9.6% during 2020-22, which is nearly one-third lower than a decade prior when the food insecurity rate was 14.4% during 2010-12 (Rabbitt et al., 2023). While a lower food insecurity rate is encouraging, there may be upcoming challenges ensuring that these needs are met because many COVID-19-era policies that provided increased benefits over the past few years, such as emergency SNAP allotments, have ended due to the expiration of the public health emergency status. Somewhat offsetting the overall loss of benefits from COVID-19 response programs, SNAP's annual inflation adjustment has slightly increased due to increased food costs (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities [CBPP], 2023). Ongoing, proactive support is necessary to ensure that children and families can meet their food and nutrition needs because these are interconnected to broader aspects of Kansas.

Fulfillment of children and families' basic needs of food and nutrition also sustains the Kansas economy. Because SNAP benefits are dedicated to food purchases, they support the food supply chain, which includes farmers, processors, distributors, and retailers. More than 2,000 food retailers accept SNAP benefits in Kansas (USDA, 2022). With recurring monthly disbursements, food assistance program participants generate a substantial amount of revenue for Kansas businesses: An average of \$21 million in SNAP benefits were issued each month in Kansas in fiscal year 2020 (USDA, 2022).

Kansas families are also experiencing some financial relief through a three-year plan to completely eliminate state sales tax on grocery purchases (Kansas Office of the Governor, 2023c). From a starting point of 6.5%, incremental decreases began in 2023 with a lower tax rate of 4%, which reduced to 2% in 2024.



In 2025, the state sales tax on grocery purchases will be removed.

This year's reduction to the 2% rate will save Kansans a collective \$150 million in 2024. Saving families money on purchases to meet their basic needs can make a significant difference in their ability to meet their basic needs and improve their overall quality of life. Additionally, when families can financially meet their basic needs, their purchasing power boosts their community and state.

Housing

Children whose families have access to safe, affordable housing experience better health and well-being outcomes because they are more likely to access nutritious food, positive family interactions, and consistent living environments (Maqbool et al., 2015). However, housing is becoming more unaffordable for more families in Kansas.

With rising costs of homes and interest rates making homeownership unaffordable for many Kansas families, most families are renters out of necessity, not because they do not want to be homeowners, but because they simply cannot afford to be homeowners. To illustrate, Kansas households earning less than \$75,000 annual income are more likely to rent than own a home, which is a gap that becomes more prominent as household income decreases (KAC, 2022). Although homeownership has long been challenging for many families to attain, especially families earning lower incomes, the prospect of renting is now a growing challenge.

Almost one in four Kansas households experience housing cost burdens that equate to spending 30% or more of a household's income on housing (mySidewalk, 2023). Out of all Kansas households earning less than \$75,000 annual income, renters are almost three times more likely to experience excessive monthly housing costs compared to homeowners (KAC, 2022). Housing costs are increasing

for renters, but wages and incomes remain stagnant, requiring families to spend larger percentages of their income on housing compared to families with higher incomes (KAC, 2022).

Over the past decade, the percentage of renters considered cost burdened increased in 61 Kansas counties (Kansas Housing Resources Corporation [KHRC] et al., 2021). Today, every two in five Kansas renters experience excessive housing costs (mySidewalk, 2023). In 2023, a family of four that earned 100% FPL earned less than two-thirds of the estimated annual income of \$46,645 needed to afford a three-bedroom apartment in Kansas (HHS, 2023; National Low Income Housing Coalition [NLIHC], 2023). A Kansan working full-time at minimum wage cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment (KAC, 2022). Consequently, families may find temporary or long-term shelter in low-quality housing and/or have more family members sharing less space, which can adversely affect young children's health and development along with other negative family outcomes (Maqbool et al., 2015).

Rural communities experience unique housing challenges. Housing stock in rural Kansas is aging, and many rural counties have over 20% of houses considered in poor condition (KHRC et al., 2021). Rural areas are more likely to experience depressed housing values compared to more densely populated communities, which often makes new construction less incentivizing in rural areas, contributing to a shortage of safe, affordable housing. Moreover, homelessness increased during the pandemic and now 18% of the nation's unhoused population is in rural communities (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2023). With families who live in rural communities earning relatively lower wages and having fewer and lower-quality housing options available, they are more likely to experience greater food insecurity and limited access to health care (Maqbool et al., 2015).





Health Care

As of January 1, 2024, Kansas remains one of 10 states, including Washington, D. C., that has not expanded Medicaid eligibility under the Affordable Care Act (KFF, 2023b).

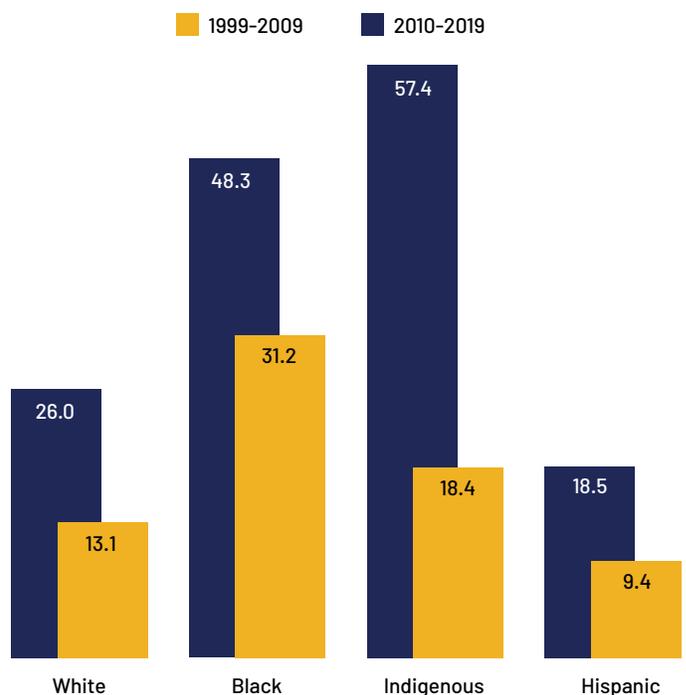
In 2014, the Kansas legislature passed H.B. 2552, which requires legislative approval before the state can adopt and implement Medicaid expansion. In the 2023 Legislative Session, Kansas legislature introduced two bills, H.B. 2415 and S.B. 225, to expand Medicaid coverage to adults with incomes at or below 138% FPL, which equates to \$41,400 annual income for a family of four. However, no proposed legislation moved forward before the session adjourned in April 2023. Today, an estimated 82,000 uninsured Kansans would become eligible for Medicaid if the state opted to expand public health care coverage, which could reduce the uninsured rate by about one-third (PN-3, 2023). Unfortunately, without increasing the income threshold for Medicaid enrollment, Kansans are essentially incentivized to not enter the workforce because the cost to pay for health insurance with earned wages is more expensive than it is to remain unemployed and qualify for Medicare and other benefits (Tipirneni et al., 2022). In September 2023, the national uninsured rate (7.9%) for health care reached its lowest level since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. USCB, 2023

Though the uninsured rate in Kansas (8.6%) was slightly higher than the national average, fewer Kansans were uninsured in 2022 compared to 2021 (9.2%; USCB, 2023a). While the state’s uninsured rate is slightly improving, nearly one-quarter of a million (247,000) Kansans were still uninsured in 2022. However, the uninsured rate may begin to increase when some Kansans are disenrolled from Medicaid due to federal funding changes in 2023. Particularly, the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) increased funding during the pandemic to ensure continuous Medicaid enrollment, but CMS directed states redetermine Medicaid eligibility of enrollees in April 2023, putting thousands of Kansans at risk of disenrollment. Estimated risks are higher in some areas and among racial and ethnic minorities (KHI, 2023), groups with already lower insurance rates. Kansans who were Hispanic (20.1%) and Black (10.5%) were disproportionately uninsured compared to Kansans who were White (6.3%; USCB, 2023b).

Disproportionately negative experiences and outcomes for communities of color are not limited to uninsured health care rates in Kansas. Regardless of socioeconomic status, research shows that families of color also experience disproportionately negative health care outcomes, particularly surrounding maternal and child health (Howland et al., 2019; Mehra et al., 2020; Vilda et al., 2019). Nationally, Black and Indigenous women have higher rates of pregnancy-related death compared to White women, which further increased for Black women during the pandemic (Hill et al., 2022). Similarly, Black and Indigenous infants have markedly higher mortality rates than infants born to White women. Nationally and in Kansas, maternal mortality rates have increased among all racial/ethnic groups over the past two decades (Fleszar et al., 2023).

Over the past two decades in Kansas, maternal mortality rates have doubled for White and Hispanic women and tripled for Indigenous women (Fleszar et al., 2023). Maternal mortality rates for Black women were twice that of White women two decades ago and remain roughly the same proportion today. Black and Indigenous women in Kansas now experience significantly higher maternal mortality rates than mothers who are White.

Figure 11.
Kansas Maternal Mortality Rates
Per 100,000 Population.
Fleszar et al., 2023

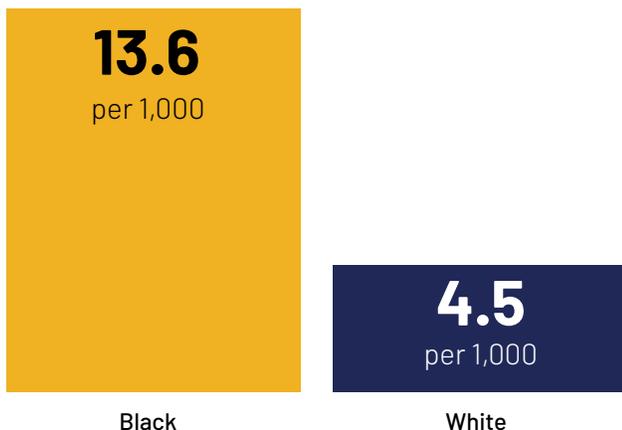


Despite these significant health care disparities in Kansas, research-based practices do exist to better support pregnant and birthing women of color. To illustrate, a study conducted with women of color, who received community-based pre- and perinatal services provided to families with low-income in San Francisco, identified that supports can improve by fostering patient-provider relationship-building and trust in a safe space (Altman et al., 2020). Prenatal and postpartum supports for families of color, such as group prenatal care and community-based doula programs, actively promote the adequate and dignified health care for women of color, ultimately improving outcomes for mothers, children, and families of color (e.g., Abshire et al., 2019; Earnshaw et al., 2016; Mallick et al., 2022). Despite the growing research base for these health care practices that support families of color, Kansas has not yet established statewide group prenatal care or community-based doula programs (PN-3, 2023). Some counties and communities across Kansas, including Douglas County, Wichita, and the Kansas City Metro area, are engaging in efforts to improve prenatal and postpartum supports.

Disproportionate experiences based on race extend beyond pregnancy-related maternal deaths and are acutely experienced by Black women and babies. In Kansas, the preterm birth rate for Black women in Kansas (almost 15%) is about 1.5 times higher than all other birthing women in Kansas (about 10%; March of Dimes, 2023). Similarly, the infant mortality rate among Black infants (13.6 per 1,000 births) is three times higher than White infants (4.5 per 1,000 births), which has been a consistent trend for more than two decades (KDHE, 2022a).

Figure 12.
Infant mortality rate per 1,000 births.

KDHE, 2022a



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Prenatal and Postpartum Support Programs



Mi Apoyo Prenatal, Spanish for “my prenatal support,” provides care coordination/ case management, prenatal education, and parent support for uninsured pregnant women in Douglas County. In 2023, Mi Apoyo Prenatal assisted 154 caregivers by locating low-cost or free prenatal care, helping with enrollment documents, and providing interpretation services for families during health care appointments.

Doulas of Douglas County aims to bring together a group of community-based doulas who can provide doula and breastfeeding support, childbirth education for women of color, as well as infant and toddler child care services to families who seek assistance.

Uzazi Village, a non-profit organization in the Kansas City area, aims to reduce maternal and infant health disparities for women of color and their families by providing a variety of services, including education, doula training and workforce development, doula support for families, and advocacy.

The Kansas Birth Justice Society in Wichita supports maternal and infant health care and reproductive justice by developing a diverse workforce of pregnancy, birth, and early childhood professionals that provide community-based care.

Data indicate an urgent need to improve maternal and child health care for all, with particular emphasis indicated for Black and Indigenous women and children.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Kansas Initiatives to Address Disparities

Although we have a long road ahead, several cross-sector early childhood initiatives are underway to address maternal health disparities in Kansas:

- **\$1,170,233 to KDHE for the State Maternal Health Innovation Program**, which will establish a maternal health task force to improve the collection and use of state-level data on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity.
- **\$309,258 to Kansas University Medical Center for the Maternity Care Nursing Workforce Expansion (MatCare) Training Program**, which will strengthen the nurse midwifery workforce through trainee scholarships, stipends, curriculum enhancement, and community-based training.
- **\$3,750,000 to KDHE and state and local partners over the next five years to continue the Kansas Connecting Communities (KCC) collaborative initiative**, which builds provider capacity through training and consultation for OB/GYNs, Certified Nurse Midwives, and other maternal care providers to improve the mental health and well-being of pregnant and postpartum women through increased screening, timely assessment, effective referrals, and reducing barriers to accessing treatment.
- **\$200,000 to KDHE for Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) State Capacity** to support safe maternal care to reduce several maternal death in hospitals and birthing centers.



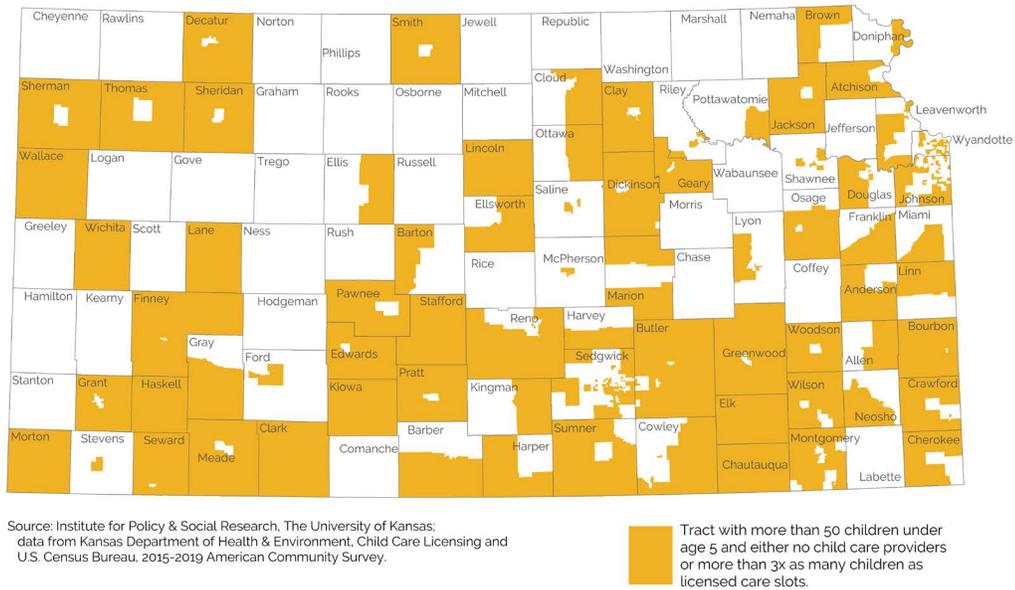
Child Care

Child care provides family members with designated time to fulfill obligations to their family, such as work and self-care, and community, such as contributing to the

Kansas workforce and economy (Heggeness et al., 2024). Access to affordable child care ensures that children's basic needs can be met, such as eating and sleeping, while also facilitating early learning and development through play. Because of the crucial development that takes place during children's early years, families need to trust whoever is caring for their children. Families also need to have child care that is reliable so that they can participate in the workforce, but many families across the state experience unreliable child care. In a study of 770 Kansas families representative of the state's population conducted by Wichita State University's Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE) Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) in partnership with the Department for Children and Families (DCF), almost one-third (31%) of respondents were unable to work full-time and another quarter (26%) of respondents unable to work part-time due to lack of reliable child care.

There are over 4,500 licensed child care programs in Kansas, which include public and private home-, center-, and school-based programs (KDHE, 2023f). However, estimated child care capacity across Kansas in 2023 only met about 44% of the current demand, with an estimated 84,742 additional slots needed (CCA-KS, 2023a). Although there has been a slight increase in the number of licensed child care programs over the last few years, there is still a sizable gap between the supply of child care programs and demand for child care by families in Kansas. Though there is more child care demand than supply across the state, we can identify areas of extreme need by locating child care deserts, which are communities with more than 50 children under age 5 that either have no child care providers or have three times the number of children as there are licensed child care slots. Rural and frontier counties in Kansas are more likely to be considered child care deserts, as shown in [Figure 13](#) on the next page.

Figure 13. Child Care Deserts in Kansas, December 2021



Medium-sized child care centers in Kansas, those with approximately 70 children enrolled, frequently operate in deficits on an annual basis (KU-CPPR, 2022a, 2022c). Child care program owners and administrators must carefully balance their overhead costs with families' ability to pay for child care. In the state's current single-payer business model for child care, rising child care costs are often passed along to families in the form of increased tuition, leaving parents to either pay more at their current program, find and transition to a more affordable program, or go without child care. In addition to the burden of child care cost placed on families, the current business model negatively affects child care administrators, employers, and the Kansas economy (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2021; KU-CPPR, 2022c). Instead, multi-payer child care business models ease this burden by funding child care through a three-way split between family, employer, and government sources. As discussed in the [Ecosystem Section](#), innovative alternatives to the single-payer child care business model are being implemented or piloted, with Michigan, Kentucky, and North Dakota as examples of these efforts. All groups can benefit from multi-payer

approaches to child care: families experience lower out-of-pocket tuition costs, child care program owners and administrators can adequately operate their programs without sacrificing child safety, employers can recruit and retain qualified and skilled workers who are parents, and the Kansas economy can experience ripple effects that generate increased local and state revenue.

Even for families earning livable wages through stable employment, child care remains largely unaffordable. The average annual child care cost is \$11,222 for an infant and \$8,798 for a four-year-old, which both exceed annual in-state tuition of \$8,737 for a four-year public college (Economic Policy Institute, 2020). For a Kansas family of four earning a median household income of \$64,521, child care for an infant and four-year-old would cost almost one-third (31%) of their annual income if they did not apply for and receive Child Care Assistance (USCB, 2022b). Because of this excessive cost, many families opt out of child care programs altogether and decide for one parent—usually mothers—to stay home to care for their children, a trend magnified by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (Calarco et al., 2021; Limonic, 2023).

Child Care Assistance is available to families with incomes at or below 250% FPL, which is below \$75,000 annual income for a family of four. An eligible family can select an available child care provider who meets eligibility criteria, such as being licensed by KDHE and enrolled as a DCF child care provider (Whiteside-Hicks, 2023). Over the past decade, the number of children enrolled in the Child Care Assistance program has declined from a monthly average of 17,682 children in 2012 to a monthly average of 11,737 in 2021 (DCF, 2023c). Less than half of the licensed child care facilities in Kansas are enrolled as a DCF child care provider, which can be a barrier to families using Child Care Assistance (Whiteside-Hicks, 2023). Without long-term investments and collaboration across public and private sectors to stabilize and sustain child care, Kansas families may face exceedingly challenging decisions about child care, which may have ripple effects on families' abilities to meet other basic needs, as well as the Kansas economy at large.



Transportation

Transportation connects people to other basic needs, such as food, health care, and child care, as well as allows them to participate in other important aspects of daily life, such as employment, education, and socialization. Modes of transportation may differ based on locality, as public transit and bicycles are more common in densely populated areas compared to rural areas, whereas motor vehicles are common across all regions. However, transportation challenges occur in all county types.

In a study conducted by Wichita State University's CARE and PPMC, in partnership with DCF (2023), 770 families with young children across counties representative of all population density categories were surveyed. Almost half (46%) of participating families did not have a car.

63% of families (more than three-fifths) did not have access to transportation when needed.

In another study, interview and focus group participants from less densely populated communities, such as those in frontier and rural counties, indicated that availability, flexibility, and safety of public transportation were challenging issues (Kansas WorkS & KDHE, 2022). Regardless of where someone lives, inconsistent, unreliable transportation has implications for both an individual and their community. Families who experience transportation challenges likely experience challenges accessing child care, health care, and related services.

Transportation in rural communities presents unique challenges due to a lack of access to public transportation, and distance and time that rural families may need to travel to meet their basic needs and participate in society. For example, health care providers in rural areas indicate that they draw patients from one to two hours away (Wichita State University Community Engagement Institute, 2020). In 15 predominantly Frontier counties, there are no public transportation services available (KDHE, 2022c). Barriers to adequate transportation include limited or insufficient labor, supplies, facilities, and funding (Health WorkS & KDHE, 2022). Transportation challenges experienced in rural communities may magnify health disparities and health inequities, which may be disproportionately experienced by several populations including young children with and without disabilities, pregnant women, individuals with specialized health care needs, families who earn less than a livable wage, older adults, people of color, and migrant populations (Health WorkS & KDHE, 2022). Hospitals, coalitions, and partners across Kansas are collaborating to address transportation needs within their communities (Health WorkS & KDHE, 2022). However, problem-solving these transportation challenges is ongoing due to the state's steadily decreasing rural population which changes and reduces available supports, labor, and funding.

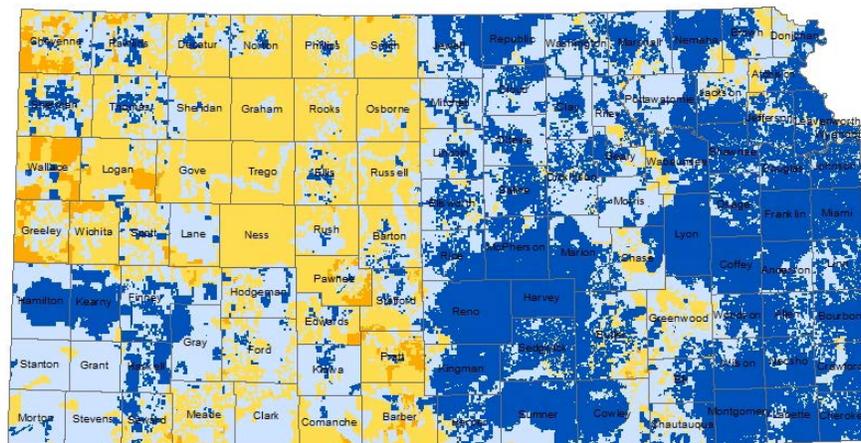


Technology

Well into the 21st Century, access to high-speed internet is not a luxury, it is a necessity. High-speed internet allows people to access informational content, such as program applications and news, and connect with others. As of 2022, almost all (93.2%) Kansas households had a computer, yet only 86.5% of households were enrolled in a broadband internet subscription (USCB, 2022b).

The importance of efficient internet became even more apparent during the pandemic, which has raised concerns about internet access, affordability, and quality across Kansas. The Institute of Political and Social Research (IPSR) at the University of Kansas sought to develop accurate understandings of broadband access across Kansas due to a historical lack of reliable and comprehensive data available (Ginther et al., 2023). Overall, researchers identified a rural-urban divide in accessibility and affordability of quality internet service, such as the one shown in [Figure 14](#). Kansans living in more densely populated areas generally had multiple internet service providers to choose from, which contributed to lower internet costs (\$74 monthly average) with faster speeds (above 100 Mbps) and higher satisfaction (70%), compared to Kansans in less populated regions who had one or no internet service providers and experienced higher internet costs (\$86 monthly average) with slower speeds (below 100 Mbps) and lower satisfaction (46%). Researchers found that Kansans who were unable to attain quality internet access reportedly experienced a range of negative feelings, such as abandonment, living in a black hole, helplessness, and frustration, among others.

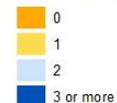
Figure 14: Broadband Internet Access in Kansas, 2020, Number of Internet Service Providers



Source: Institute for Policy & Social Research, The University of Kansas; data from Federal Communications Commission (June 2020 V1).

Data from providers offering consumers fixed broadband services, excluding satellite services.

Number of ISPs



When Kansans do not have reliable or affordable internet access, or technology to access the internet, they frequently experience low digital literacy, fewer connections to peers who are digitally literate, and challenges accessing information (Ginther et al., 2023). To fill this gap, public libraries provide Kansans with internet and computer access and librarians can promote digital literacy by assisting library patrons in expanding and improving their technology skills. Additionally, internet services at public libraries allow Kansans to access

information that can improve their well-being, such as resources to support survivors of domestic violence, and to apply for other public services, such as the range of services and supports available across the early childhood ecosystem.

Internet access is increasingly important to families with young children because information and paperwork to establish eligibility for services and supports across the early childhood ecosystem are largely available through the internet (e.g., KDHE, 2023c; KSDE, 2023d).

Further, internet-based early intervention, such as virtual training and consultation, is an established, research-based alternate to in-person service provision (Meadan & Daczewitz, 2015). Remote early intervention service provision can facilitate statistically significant progress toward child and family goals when families in rural areas have reliable internet access (Rooks-Ellis et al., 2020). The abrupt shift from in-person to remote learning and service provision during the pandemic highlighted the importance—and unreliability—of internet access for families with children (Ginther et al., 2023). Therefore, having reliable and affordable internet and technology access is essential to support young Kansas families make the shift from surviving to thriving.

To increase availability and quality of internet in the state, Kansas recently approved millions of dollars to expand broadband access to rural communities (Kansas Department of Commerce, 2023). The state government's acknowledgment of the importance of high-speed internet has helped lower internet costs.

30%

of eligible Kansas households have enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program as of January 2024. This effort will help decrease the cost of high-speed internet. *Kansas Office of the Governor, 2023a; Universal Service Administrative Company, 2024.*

Implications of Unmet Basic Needs

To improve long-term child and family well-being, the interconnectedness of many barriers experienced by children and families must be recognized (Friedline et al., 2021; KSDE, 2023c; Skinner et al., 2023). Families with young children can best thrive within a sustainable early childhood ecosystem of support, which can come to fruition when challenges to meeting basic needs discussed in this section are addressed. However, an inefficient and ineffective early childhood ecosystem can perpetuate, and even magnify, these same challenges experienced by children and families. This shift will cause ripple effects that negatively affect the Kansas economy, workforce, individuals, and communities.

Fostering Employment

Employment is essential for most families to meet their basic needs. A livable wage, one that allows families to meet basic needs and be self-sufficient, is necessary. Administration, transportation, sales, service, production, and education are the state's six largest employment industries in Kansas, employing more than half of its workforce, but median wages across these top industries fall below a livable wage (BLS, 2023a). Much of the Kansas workforce is insufficiently compensated, which undermines their abilities to adequately meet basic needs.

Out of the nearly 1.5 million adults in the Kansas workforce, 44% are parents and 10% are parents of young children (USCB, 2023). Unfortunately, more than 60,000 Kansas parents of minor children are out of the workforce, which leaves Kansas with lower workforce participation than Missouri and Nebraska (Heggeness, 2023). On a positive note, 70% of married couples with at least one child younger than five have both parents working, which increased to 80% after at least one child is school-age (Heggeness, 2023).

Employment is crucial for women's economic security, social equality, and the overall sustainability of the economy (Alon et al., 2020; Hyland et al., 2020). Yet, women are five to eight times more likely than men to have their employment affected by caregiving responsibilities, such as taking on brief or extended caregiving responsibilities for a sick child or aging parent, which may require mothers to work part-time or to take extended time away from employment due to challenges arranging or affording child care (Almeida & Salas-Betsch, 2023; Alon et al., 2020). Relatedly, the increased caregiving burden on mothers can negatively affect their income. In particular, the poverty rate for single mother households is 34% in Kansas (KDHE, 2022c). Researchers have found that availability and accessibility of public child care and child care assistance programs can counteract the caregiving burden placed on mothers, especially for single mothers and mothers with lower incomes, by ensuring that their children are safe and cared for so that mothers can dedicate adequate time to work, training, or continuing education (Heggeness et al., 2024).

Families can best meet their basic needs when they have stable employment where they earn sufficient income and have supportive employers (KDHE, 2021; Williams et al., 2019). In a recent survey of Kansans who were asked about employer support, such as flexibility for family

emergencies, respectful and accommodating of family responsibilities, career advancement, 40% of parents of young children reported experiencing high employer support, as did 38% of rural dwellers (KU-CPPR, 2023e). While these are considerable percentages of high employer support, more than half of survey respondents reported less positive sentiments about employer support. Rigid workplace policies are often at odds with families' abilities to meet basic needs and adjust to evolving needs, especially when raising young children.

Rigid workplace policies, which are associated with lower wage positions, contribute to work-family conflicts (Rhee et al., 2020). These policies often create conditions that conflict with the needs of families with young children, adding stress and logistical barriers to families (Williams et al., 2019). Because lower wage positions are associated with inconsistent or off-hour schedules, parents or other primary caregivers may not be able to participate in recurring family routines responsibilities and, such as mealtimes and bedtimes, doctor appointments, and child care pick-ups and drop-offs (Swanberg et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2019). Additionally, lower wage jobs frequently offer limited or no parental or sick leave, which can lead to employees losing pay if they need to care for their child or postpone caring for their child and meeting their child's basic needs by remaining at work (Stoddard-Dare et al., 2018). Balancing employment, child care, and meeting basic needs is challenging, especially for families who earn lower wages.

Family-friendly workplace policies include adequate wages, flexible work schedules, comprehensive and affordable health coverage, paid parental leave, lactation and breastfeeding supports, and more (Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition, 2023). These adjustments increase opportunities for families to establish and maintain employment while also benefiting employers by boosting productivity and reducing turnover (Williams et al., 2018). Implementing these flexible workplace policies can strengthen families, businesses, and the Kansas economy. Therefore, recent efforts have been devoted to evaluating and improving the family-friendliness of workplaces across Kansas.

To date, 29 Kansas employers have participated in the Family-Friendly Workplace Employee Survey, administered by Kansas Power of the Positive (KPoP), to gain insight from their employees about ways to better support

employees who have children (Ringerling, 2023). Overall, employees generally reported their employers' efforts as "good" at addressing the following characteristics of family-friendly workplaces: paid parental leave, flexible work schedules, employee wellness offerings, and breastfeeding support. Still, results suggested that there is room for progress. Employees categorized support for child care access as "fair" and collectively rated the following conditions as "poor:" subsidizing child care costs, providing on-site child care, offering access to parenting support and other family resources, and supporting infants in the workplace.

Additionally, [Family-Friendly Workplace Employee Survey](#) results revealed that family-friendly workplace conditions are not equitably distributed among jobs, industries, and workers (Ringerling, 2023). Employees who earned hourly wages, worked in manufacturing, and those who identified as Black and Hispanic women were more likely to rate their workplaces as "poor" or less family-friendly among certain conditions compared to peers who worked in salaried positions, in non-manufacturing industries, and who were White. Next to paid family leave, breastfeeding supports may be the family-friendly policies that most directly benefit women in the workplace. Only about one-fourth (34%) of employers have dedicated lactation rooms ([Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition, 2021](#)).

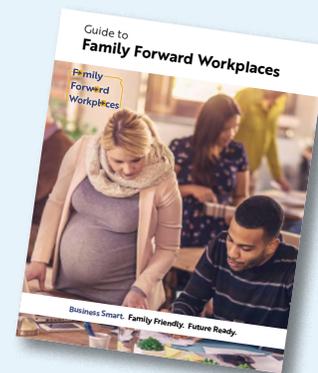
Less than half (44%)
of Kansas employers indicate
that they have a written lactation
accommodation policy.
Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition, 2021

This is an encouraging sign, but more progress is anticipated due to the federal [PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act](#) and [Pregnant Workers Fairness Act](#) that went into effect December 2022 and June 2023 respectively, which require all employers to provide breastfeeding workers with private, clean spaces, other than restrooms, along with reasonable break time to express milk for up to one year after the child's birth.

Resource Spotlight: Family Forward Workplaces

Family Forward Workplaces is an innovative initiative to improve children’s health and well-being and keep Kansas businesses and workplaces competitive. It is an 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.

The [Guide to Family Forward Workplaces](#) provides evidence-based guidance on the benefits of family friendly workplace policies, sample policies and case studies of successful implementation, and steps for how to get started implementing new policies or enhancing existing ones. Kansas business owners and employees can use this guide as a reference to start conversation and action to support working families and strengthen the Kansas economy.



Navigating Early Childhood Services and Supports

In Kansas, early childhood services and supports are part of a larger early childhood ecosystem that facilitates achievement of healthy development, strong families, and early learning (Kansas Children’s Cabinet, 2020). The purpose of this comprehensive ecosystem is to support families to meet their basic needs, which promotes bright futures for young children. Though early childhood in Kansas primarily supports children and families by focusing on early learning and development, this ecosystem aims to broadly support child and family well-being because children, families, and their supports are interrelated.

Families often must take a “connect the dots” approach to navigating services and supports. This is due to fragmentation across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem. Though early childhood services and supports still exist in distinct sectors, several cross-agency collaborative initiatives, many of which were detailed in the Ecosystem and Workforce Sections, have been developed and implemented to minimize the navigation burden placed on families with improved ecosystem efficiency. However, navigating the array of early childhood services and supports within the ecosystem generally remains challenging for all families. Additionally, specific points within early childhood can be especially difficult, such as transitions into preschool and kindergarten, and some populations may face greater barriers than others.

For example, Kansas parents and caregivers involved with the child welfare system were more likely than the general population to experience barriers navigating the early childhood ecosystem (DCF, 2022). The Parent Experience Survey included 647 participants who were Kansas parents and caregivers who had lived experience with the child welfare system, such as receiving ongoing support from a case worker, having children in foster care, and interacting with courts as part of their child welfare case. Parents and caregivers involved with the child welfare system indicated difficulty that they could find (25%), access (33%), and quickly receive (33%) early childhood services.

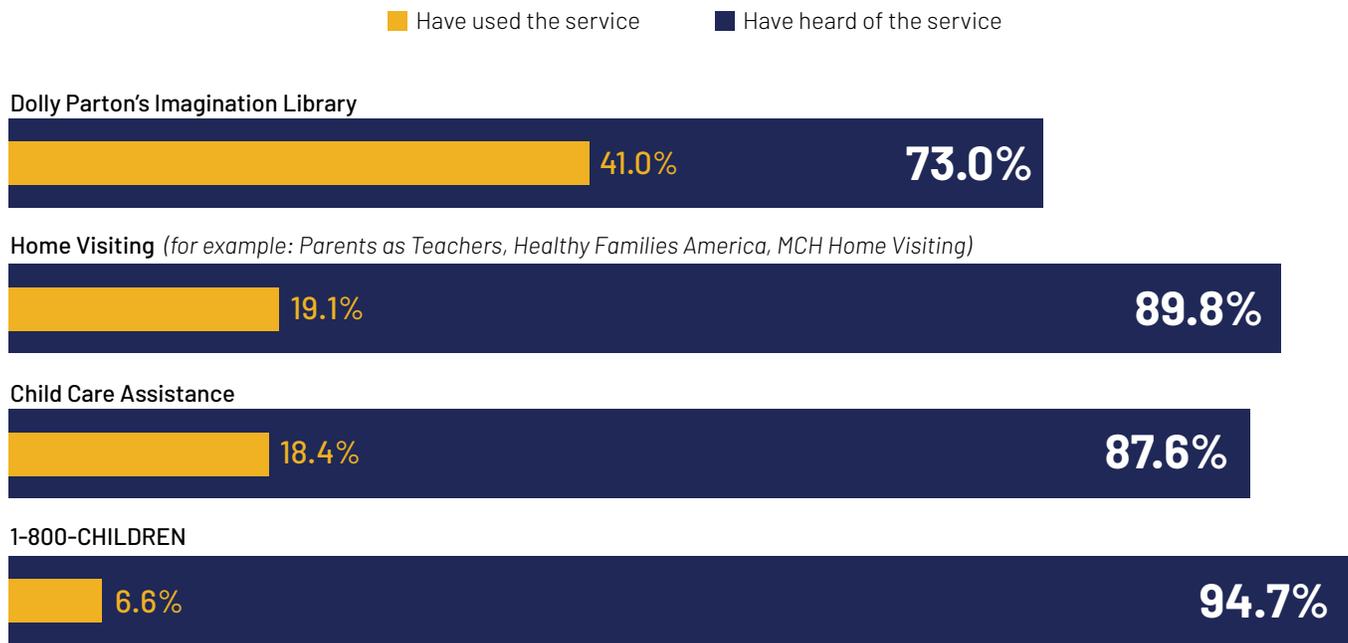


Another barrier that many Kansas families may face is to not have a strong sense of belonging or feel represented within their community. In a study conducted by CPPR, *Young Families' Experiences of Social Connection (2023e)*, 1,062 Kansans participated in a survey designed to understand experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of parents with young children as they relate to social connectedness and support.

Respondents' demographic characteristics, including race, ethnicity, and educational attainment, largely mirrored those of the Kansas population. By design, the study oversampled parents of young children (38%) and families residing in rural areas (28%). In addition, women (65%), English-speakers (99%), and those with incomes below the median household income for the state (\$68,925; 72%) were overrepresented in the sample. Results demonstrated that Kansas family units generally appear to be resilient, but this resilience probably does not extend out to communities within which families are

situated. For example, two-thirds of Kansas families with young children felt as though their family was thriving and that they were supported by their family and personal choices. However, almost all (93%) Kansas parents of young children reported having only some, little, or no input in their community. In general, about half of Kansan survey respondents did not feel that they trusted someone whom they could ask for advice about one or more of the following basic needs: mental health, finances, food and nutrition, relationships, parenting. Within the early childhood ecosystem, a majority of families with young children under 6 or those who were expecting reported being familiar with early childhood initiatives and services but had not used or participated in them (see table "Family Experiences with early childhood Services and Supports"). Therefore, data suggest a disconnect between families and communities and available supports. However, further examination is warranted to better understand why families experience these disconnects.

Figure 15. Family Experiences With Early Childhood Services and Supports.
KU-CPPR, 2023e





When families do navigate supports and services within the early childhood ecosystem, they often experience this as outsiders who have less knowledge than professionals, which can lead to less informed and unilateral decision-making. In a Fall 2022 survey of over 1,500 Kansas families and providers (KU-CPPR, 2022a), three themes emerged from the findings:

- Families express gaps in awareness and knowledge of their child’s developmental health.
- Families feel overwhelmed trying to navigate and access timely developmental health information about their child(ren).
- Families have a hard time identifying “who to trust” to provide culturally responsive information and supports.

Therefore, data reveal that Kansas families may not feel confident navigating early childhood supports and services due to challenges establishing trusting relationships with professionals and programs that serve them.

To learn how to better support families across Kansas, the Our Tomorrows (KU-CPPR, 2023d) project captured family experiences about thriving and surviving. Our Tomorrows comprises both a data collection tool and a community development approach that invites families, communities, and decision-makers into a shared process for making sense of our daily realities. In summer 2023, the project collected stories from 214 Kansans. Recruitment efforts prioritized people whose annual household incomes were \$35,000 or less, and who had children ages five and younger living in the household. Our Tomorrows data indicated that for families seeking early childhood services, trust was the most important factor. Responding to the Our Tomorrows prompt “when I need help with something for myself and/or my family, I first turn to...,” Kansans tended to prioritize trust over both cost and shared culture, language, and beliefs.

Particularly tellingly, Kansans were more likely to trust family, friends, and their own intuitions, but not doctors, agencies, or the news. Responding to the prompt “I usually trust information that comes from...,” respondents were far less likely to place a dot near “doctors, community agencies, news outlets, or others” than they were “my family or friends” and “my own experiences and instincts.”

For young Kansan families, interconnected factors of trust, connection, and community seem to make otherwise unbearable, and often unexpected, experiences more manageable. Results showed that essential support emerged from authentic social connections amongst Kansans within their local communities. This support was often not sought, but instinctually provided by their community at times when young families needed support the most. To illustrate:

“It’s a close-knit community where everyone knows everyone else. We have a strong sense of community spirit, and we’re always willing to help out our neighbors.”

“Recently took care of a family at work whose baby needed to go to a large facility when she was born. I am loosely friends with mom, and I was able to see how the community banded together to take care of mom while she was in Kansas City with her baby, from food to caring for her house and dogs.”

“Our community definitely feels like a big family and it’s nice to have peace of mind knowing that my children have people around them that we trust who would be able to help them if needed.”

Speaking to the experience of having to relocate their family, including three young children, during a “debilitating heat wave,” one Kansan shared:

“Thankfully, our local community has been such a relieving support system. Between food, fans, furniture, and other donations, it has cushioned what otherwise has been a horrible experience.”

Families have invaluable knowledge based on their lived experience and interactions with the early childhood ecosystem, early childhood professionals, and their communities. Insights gleaned from families who participated in Young Families’ Experiences of Social Connection (2023e) and Our Tomorrows (KU-CPPR, 2023d) are key to understanding complex barriers to early childhood service provision in Kansas. These findings also suggest that families are uniquely situated to engage in problem-solving and decision-making efforts to develop an early childhood ecosystem that is most responsive to their needs.



Opportunities and Next Steps

This Needs Assessment identified many ongoing and upcoming initiatives across Kansas to ensure that all Kansas children and families can thrive (*All In For Kansas Kids*, 2020a). Notable progress has been made toward the provision of accessible, affordable, and available services and supports for children and families through a coordinated, high-quality early childhood ecosystem. Needs were identified based on analysis of systems work that has occurred since the development of the five-year *All In For Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan (2020b). These needs were presented as findings to guide future work within the Kansas early childhood ecosystem. The gap analysis in [Table 11](#) demonstrates existing strengths identified in the 2019 Needs Assessment and new strengths identified since then, as well as gaps and opportunities for improvement across the Kansas early childhood programs, services, and infrastructure.

In this section, we briefly summarize key findings discussed in these previous sections:

- The Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem
- The Early Childhood Workforce in Kansas
- Experiences of Children and Families

Gap Analysis

Table 11: Kansas Early Childhood Programs, Services, and Infrastructure

Element	Existing Strengths from 2019 Needs Assessment	New Strengths since 2019 Needs Assessment	Gaps/Opportunities
Population Need and Capacity	Range of data regarding geographical distribution of numbers and service saturation, demographics of children receiving services, waitlist numbers, and services utilized by underserved populations.	<p>Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard launched in 2023 to provide unduplicated count of children receiving and awaiting services.</p> <p>Federal grant to enhance KSDE longitudinal data system to utilize unique child identifiers.</p>	Opportunities to enhance understandings about children and families served across all early childhood services through statistical analyses of unduplicated data counts.
Navigation and Transition	<p>Statewide early childhood programs that support early learning, healthy development, and strong families.</p> <p>Early Childhood Block Grant.</p> <p>State home visiting network.</p> <p>Pre-K offerings in most school districts with local flexibility.</p> <p>Local efforts to reach and engage underserved populations through coordinated recruiting and centralized entry points.</p> <p>Efforts to increase trauma-informed education, care, and approaches.</p> <p>Developmental screenings and Child-Find activities. Local efforts to support smooth transitions across the system.</p> <p>Integrated Referral and Intake System (IRIS).</p> <p>Help Me Grow (HMG).</p>	<p>1-800-CHILDREN centralized access point as part of HMG.</p> <p>Statewide online access to Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) for early childhood programs.</p> <p>Baby Steps pilot and expansion.</p> <p>Bridges program pilot.</p> <p>Child Care Accelerator Projects.</p> <p>Kindergarten Transition Toolkit.</p> <p>Statewide Expansion of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library.</p> <p>Expansion of Family Resource Centers.</p> <p>IRIS growth.</p> <p>UniteUS statewide agreement.</p> <p>Initiation, planning, and implementation of community-driven child care solutions facilitated by Child Care Aware of Kansas’ Communities in Action (CIA) and Go Team programs.</p> <p>Efforts to recruit more child care providers to be enrolled with Child Care Assistance.</p> <p>Technical assistance facilitated by Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities’ Infant-Toddler Specialist Network (KCCTO-ITSN) for early childhood professionals around infant-toddler mental health and caring for children with disabilities.</p> <p>Updated and expanded consumer education website (childcareinkansas.com) administered by the Department for Children and Families (DCF).</p>	<p>Limited child care capacity for infant-toddler care, care for children with disabilities, or care for nontraditional hours.</p> <p>Geographic variability in child care capacity.</p> <p>Limited full-day, full-week Pre-K offerings.</p> <p>Range of eligibility criteria and processes for children considered “high-risk” or “at-risk.”</p> <p>Common disruptors: Cultural and linguistic barriers, geography, transportation, cost, and crises.</p> <p>Children reaching kindergarten without experiencing quality or any early education opportunities.</p> <p>Geographic and racial/ethnic inequities.</p> <p>Opportunities to expand IDEA Part C eligibility to infants and toddlers considered “at-risk.”</p> <p>Statewide referral networks/resources create opportunities for cross-sector collaboration around service referrals.</p> <p>Increased alignment efforts across multiple home visiting programs can present families with options that meet their evolving needs.</p> <p>Opportunities exist to continue streamlining the enrollment experience for families.</p>

Element	Existing Strengths <i>from 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	New Strengths <i>since 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	Gaps/Opportunities
Quality Across the Broader Early Childhood System	<p>Kansas Prekindergarten Guide and Kansas Full-Day Kindergarten Guide.</p> <p>Kansas Family Engagement and Partnership Standards for Early Childhood.</p> <p>Kansas Quality Network/Quality Rating and Improvement System Pilot.</p> <p>Child Care Quality Initiative.</p> <p>Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.</p> <p>Kansans Can Star Recognition Program.</p> <p>Measurement of classroom quality using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System® (CLASS).</p> <p>Focus on quality and quality improvements across system at both local and state levels.</p> <p>Common Measures for ECBG.</p>	<p>Update of the Kansas Early Learning Standards.</p> <p>The Kansas Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) system modernization with Links 2 Quality (L2Q) pilot program.</p> <p>Quality improvement subgrants.</p> <p>Sunflower Summer Report.</p> <p>Statewide expansion of training on, and access to the ASQ for all early childhood settings.</p>	<p>Fragmented data collection regarding the quality of all early education settings.</p> <p>Lack of consistent definition of quality within and across early childhood settings.</p> <p>Expanding the reach of L2Q.</p> <p>Development and implementation of the Workforce Registry and the Career Pathway create opportunities to develop a continuum of high-quality training offerings aligned with home visiting and child care core competencies.</p>

Element	Existing Strengths <i>from 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	New Strengths <i>since 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	Gaps/Opportunities
Workforce	<p>Highly experienced child care workforce.</p> <p>Credentials of the home visiting and Part C workforce.</p> <p>Professional development networks.</p> <p>Access to required professional development.</p>	<p>Efforts to establish a workforce registry.</p> <p>Establishment and ongoing implementation of the Kansas Career Pathway for early childhood Professionals.</p> <p>Updated Core Competencies for Kansas early childhood professionals.</p> <p>The development of Shared Service Networks for Child Care professionals and businesses.</p> <p>Exploring wage scale and compensation strategies for early childhood professionals.</p>	<p>Varying early childhood workforce qualifications across services, programs, and models.</p> <p>Professional development accessibility: geography, cost, training topics.</p> <p>Implementation of the Pathway will begin with a statewide workforce study aimed at identifying factors essential to early childhood professional recruitment, training, and retention.</p> <p>Opportunities to improve workforce compensation and benefits.</p> <p>Recruitment and retention of diverse, highly qualified workforce.</p> <p>The Workforce Registry will provide opportunities to better understand workforce needs (e.g., training and professional development opportunities) based on relevant workforce data.</p> <p>Continued expansion of the Career Pathway and the Workforce Registry for use beyond child care.</p> <p>System-level approach and funding alignment to support workforce across all early childhood settings.</p>

Element	Existing Strengths <i>from 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	New Strengths <i>since 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	Gaps/Opportunities
Facilities	Interest and support for co-location of agencies and organizations in the broader early childhood system.	<p>Capital Project Fund Accelerator with private support and match provided for Accelerator grants.</p> <p>Start-up stipends for new child care facilities and to address health and safety issues.</p> <p>The development of Shared Service Networks for Child Care professionals and businesses.</p>	<p>Limited information or data regarding physical conditions of early childhood facilities.</p> <p>Need to consider facility improvements, maintenance, design, and engineering necessary for facilities to endure extreme weather events and keep children and the workforce safe during such events.</p> <p>Need to continue identifying consistent funding for facility capital needs.</p> <p>Opportunities exist to improve or enhance learning environments.</p>
Funding	Fiscal mapping effort. Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund and Children's Initiatives Fund (CIF).	<p>One-time Sustainability Grants for child care providers.</p> <p>One-time Bonus payments for child care workers.</p> <p>Waived fingerprinting and state child care licensing fee.</p> <p>Funding State Match.</p> <p>Blended and braided multiple state and federal funding sources for the Child Care Accelerator opportunity.</p> <p>State support via SPARK funds.</p>	<p>Need to consider funding for preparing facilities to endure extreme weather events and keep children and the workforce safe during such events.</p> <p>CIA, Go Team, and other community resources offer opportunities to create public-private partnerships supporting community-driven child care solutions.</p> <p>Opportunities to implement multi-payer child care business model.</p> <p>Greater flexibility and alignment with existing resources.</p>
Information Systems	Existing shared data systems and measures (Common Measures).	<p>Establishment of ECIDS Data Trust.</p> <p>Statewide ASQ Online System.</p> <p>Technology for Home Visiting families to support remote visits.</p> <p>Development of the Workforce Registry.</p> <p>Investment to upgrade child care licensing data system.</p> <p>Creating Child Wellbeing Pathways.</p> <p>Kansas Community Data Dashboard.</p> <p>Efforts underway to modernize child care licensing system.</p>	<p>Variety and range of reporting mechanisms, requirements, and program outcomes.</p> <p>Need to expand the Workforce Registry users beyond child care professionals.</p> <p>Opportunity to continue connecting or aligning data systems such as the Workforce Registry, the child care licensing system, and child care assistance data system.</p>

Element	Existing Strengths <i>from 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	New Strengths <i>since 2019 Needs Assessment</i>	Gaps/Opportunities
Partnerships	Existing willingness and interest in partnerships and cooperation at local and state levels. Wide range of community-level partners including non-early childhood providers, organizations, and agencies.	Community-driven public-private partnerships. Increased number of Community Child Care Coalitions. K-State 105 Economic Growth Initiative. The development of Shared Service Networks for Child Care professionals and businesses. Statewide and regional philanthropic-led partnership efforts such as those supported by Dane G. Hansen Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, and the Patterson Foundation.	Need for greater cross-sector collaboration and public-private partnerships. Need for coordinated efforts focused on effective, sustainable collaboration and integration. Opportunities to compile and share lessons learned from the community-level.
Policies	Family-friendly policies for state employees. Statewide advocacy.	Expansion of Medicaid coverage for postpartum mothers. Increase in subsidy threshold. Implementing narrow cost analysis for Child Care Assistance rate setting.	Need for broader reach of family-friendly workplace policies.
Regulations	Existing regulations targeted at the safety and well-being of children.	Comprehensive child care regulation review. Re-establishment of Child Care Systems Improvement Team Small center pilot. Go-Team.	Complex regulatory learning curve. Inconsistencies interpreting and applying regulations. Burdens caused by local zoning regulations.
Systems Alignment	National Governors Association Learning Lab and Workgroup. Numerous workgroups and councils going in same direction. Statute for early childhood coordination K.S.A. 38-1901. Child care policy of the state K.S.A. 65-528. Local Interagency Coordinating Councils. Kansas Early Childhood Advisory Team.	State Directors team. Governor appointed Early Childhood Transition Task Force (Task Force) to examine the Kansas early childhood system. Launched the <i>All In for Kansas Kids</i> website. Early Childhood Recommendations Panel, Kansas Children’s Cabinet acting Early Childhood Advisory Council and State Directors Team established by Kansas Governor Executive Order 20-02	Task Force recommendations provide a path to establish a state-level, single entity for early childhood services.

Key Findings *Kansas Early Childhood Ecosystem*

The Kansas early childhood ecosystem strives to provide the programs, services, resources, information systems, and partnerships needed to support the needs of Kansas children, their families, communities, and the early childhood workforce. Efforts to strengthen this vital ecosystem must consider interdependencies, complexities, and nuances across multiple systems and partners. Partners within the Kansas early childhood ecosystem have improved collaboration and alignment across state agencies, local organizations, and community initiatives, resulting in increased access to services and supports for children, families, and early childhood professionals. However, Kansas has experienced substantial limitations to this coordinated model. The Early Childhood Transition Task Force (Task Force), established by Executive [Order 23-01](#) in January 2023, [examined how to improve](#) efficiency and effectiveness within the state’s early childhood ecosystem and [provided recommendations](#) for unification within this coordinated cross-sector ecosystem. Complimentary to Task Force outcomes, findings from the 2024 Needs Assessment identified strengths and challenges around collaboration and alignment, public-partnerships for child care, shared referral systems, early childhood ecosystem navigation for families, professionals, and communities, and cross-sector data utilization across the Kansas early childhood ecosystem. These findings should be used in conjunction with the outcomes of the Task Force to strategically plan for a more synchronous early childhood ecosystem in Kansas.

Table 12: Ecosystem Findings

Element	Finding
Coordinated Governance Structure	Collaboration across state agencies and organizations has increased, creating greater efficiency and increased access to services. Inherent limitations remain in a coordinated governance model, including fiscal and regulatory differences across agencies, and a lack of 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.
Public-Private Partnerships	Multiple funding streams were blended and braided to support child care needs within the early childhood ecosystem. However, overly restrictive requirements may prevent the state from being nimble enough to harness and capitalize on private investment in early childhood.
Data-Based Decision-Making	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.

Key Findings *Kansas Early Childhood Workforce*

The Kansas early childhood workforce is full of skilled, dedicated, and hardworking professionals who are on the front lines nurturing and caring for our youngest Kansans. Although our workforce includes a range of professional fields beside child care, such as early intervention, early education, home visiting, infant/toddler mental health, and social work, we focused on child care here because this has been identified as the greatest need and must be tackled first. Child care professionals across Kansas fulfill an essential role facilitating early learning and development for our youngest Kansans, yet do not earn livable wages. While strides are being made to streamline workforce development opportunities, systemic changes are still necessary to recruit and retain highly qualified child care professionals in the early childhood workforce. The workforce findings from the 2024 Needs Assessment focused on three areas: recruitment and retention of early childhood professionals, child care administration, and workforce development

Table 13: Workforce Findings

Element	Finding
Workforce Recruitment, Development, and Retention	Integrated initiatives are being launched to recruit, retain, and elevate highly qualified early childhood professionals. Despite these efforts, early childhood professionals question how long they can remain in the field because of low wages and lack of benefits.
Affordable Child Care	Statewide strategies helped child care administrators keep their doors open despite workforce shortages, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. For many programs, future sustainability without a long-term funding infrastructure is questionable.

Key Findings *Experiences of Kansas Children and Families*

Experiences of children and families are shaped by their race/ethnicity, where they live and work, and what services and supports they might need. Meeting basic needs is essential for all children and families to live meaningful lives and contribute to their communities. Unique resources, strengths, and challenges were identified in each Kansas region, which influenced families' lived experiences, current reality, and future aspirations. Unfortunately, many Kansas families struggle to afford their basic needs, such as food, housing, health care, and child care, which negatively affects families, communities, employers, and the state's economy. Key findings from the 2024 Needs Assessment regarding experiences of children and families centered on families' unmet basic needs, employment needs, and navigating complex early childhood services and supports.

Table 14: Findings for Children and Families

Element	Finding
Basic Needs are Fundamental	Kansas implements services and supports to address individual child and family needs, such as parent education, mental health services, and job training. However, many families cannot thrive because they cannot access the basics, such as housing, health care, transportation, employment, and livable wages.

Conclusion

We embarked on a journey to understand the current early childhood landscape in Kansas by considering stories and experiences of Kansas children, families, and early childhood professionals, as well as evaluating the current status of the early childhood ecosystem in Kansas. We identified ways in which the early childhood ecosystem supports families with young children and the ways in which it falls short in doing so. We seek a Kansas in which children and families thrive in caring, safe, and connected communities with high-quality early childhood programs and services that are accessible, available, affordable, and implemented by an early childhood workforce that is adequately compensated and highly qualified. To achieve this outcome, our resources and investments must align with our vision.

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.



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Appendices

Key Term Definitions

The 2024 Needs Assessment is funded by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five grant program. In compliance with their requirements, we are including key term definitions:

Quality early childhood care and education (ECCE)

Early childhood services and programs that provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment where every child can thrive.

Early childhood care and education availability

All families have informed, timely, and equitable access to quality early childhood care and education services and programs. Vulnerable and underserved children receive services to address specific needs with targeted supports that address more complex needs.

Vulnerable or underserved children

Children under 6 years old who experience barriers or challenges to accessing or engaging in high-quality early childhood care and education services for a range of reasons, including, but not limited to: low household income or economic instability, homelessness, trauma, parental incarceration, foster care risk or placement, and special health care and developmental needs. Two additional populations have unique needs related to the early childhood care and education system: migrant children and children from tribal populations.

Children in rural areas

Children under 6 years old who live in frontier, rural, or densely settled rural counties, per the definitions used by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Early childhood care and education system

The Kansas early childhood care and education system is a tiered system of coordinated and comprehensive supports and core services that support healthy development and early learning. Core services include early care and education, home visiting, parent education, maternal child health programs, and services, supports, and infrastructure where the child age birth through five is the primary recipient.

Children with special health care needs

Children under 6 years old who require special services due to developmental/intellectual or social-emotional disabilities, sensory or motor impairment, or chronic illness.

Migrant children

Migrant children under 6 years old who have moved from one school district to another in the past three years to enable a parent or guardian to seek or obtain temporary or seasonal agricultural or fishing work.

Tribal children

Children under 6 years old from one of the four federally recognized tribal communities in Kansas (the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas, the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and the Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska).

Table A.1: Kansas-Specific Reports Included in Current Needs Assessment Synthesis

Report	Description	URL
Broadband in Kansas: The Challenges of Digital Access and Affordability	Kansas survey of broadband coverage	ipsr.ku.edu/broadband/BroadbandinKansas.pdf
Kansas Statewide Housing Needs Assessment 2021	County-level data on the cost burden of housing	kshousingcorp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021_12-21-Kansas-Housing-Executive-Summary-Low-Res.pdf
Family-Friendly Workplace Analysis	Survey results of worker perceptions of family-friendly workplace policies	www.kdhe.ks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/29021/Family-Friendly-Workplace-Survey-Social-Equity-Analysis-PDF?bidId=
Child Care Pandemic Relief Midpoint Impact Report (Department for Children and Families, July 2022)	Summary of CCDF pandemic relief initiatives	unpublished
Interim MCH Needs Assessment (Spring 2023)	Mixed methods assessment with data on professionals and family perspectives on MCH programs and services	unpublished
Kansas Home Visiting: Connecting Parents to Support	Estimate of reach of home visiting programs among eligible families	kschildrenscabinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/KansasHomeVisiting-2022.pdf
Kansas Connecting Communities: Improving Maternal and Child Health Outcomes by Addressing Perinatal Behavioral Health	Outcome data of 4-year education program	unpublished
Kansas MIECHV Community Readiness Assessment Technical Report	County-level analysis/scoring of early childhood risk factors	unpublished
Local Interagency Coordinating Council Network Analysis	Assessment of collaboration among Local Interagency Coordinating Councils	unpublished
Kansas Speaks Fall 2022 (Statewide Public Opinion Survey)	Survey findings on perceptions of Kansas economy, government, other topics	www.fhsu.edu/docking/Kansas-Speaks/2022-kansas-speaks-report-v6.pdf
Examining the Present and Future of Child Care in Kansas	Spring 2022 results of survey of child care owners and staff	www.capita.org/capita-ideas/2022/8/2/new-report-examining-the-present-and-future-of-child-care-in-kansas
The Status of Women in Kansas	Report highlighting needs and challenges of women in the state	ipsr.ku.edu/publicat/StatusofWomeninKansas2021.pdf
KCCTO Early Childhood Workforce 2022 Statewide Needs Assessment	Survey results highlight perceptions and professional development needs/preferences of early childhood staff	unpublished
Kansas PDG B-5 Year Three Annual Performance Progress Report	Summary of grant-funded efforts under PDG Birth Through Five grant program	unpublished
2023 Child Care Supply Demand Report	Summary of capacity of child care system in Kansas	mailchi.mp/ks/supply-demand
Final Report of the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force	Recommendations to improve and unify early childhood programming in Kansas	https://governor.kansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Kansas-Early-Childhood-Transition-Task-Force-Final-Report.pdf
Kansas Statistical Abstract 2022	Latest available state, county, and city-level data for Kansas, including population, employment, and income data	https://ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/

Report	Description	URL
The Economics of Child Care and Child Care Licensing in Kansas	Results provide insight about the economics of child care and child care licensing in Kansas	currently unpublished, update in January
Chronic Disease Risk Reduction Program Evaluation: Ripple Effects Mapping Outcomes	Results show that ripple effects from tobacco cessation and prevention efforts facilitate positive early childhood development outcomes	unpublished

Table A.2: Methods Used to Engage Partners, Providers and Families in the Needs Assessment Process

Engagement Activity	Who Was Engaged	Number of Participants
Our Tomorrows: Facilitated Engagement Sessions	Family child care home provider, home visiting coordinators, Interagency Coordinating Council administrators, Preschool administrators, Researchers, and Family Resource Council Coordinators	6
Child Care Aware Focus Groups	Child care directors of facilities that closed during the pandemic (some of which reopened, others that did not)	3
Maternal and Child Health/Home Visiting Community Readiness Survey	Expectant parents and caregivers of children	580
MCH Needs Assessment Workforce	Kansas Maternal and Child Health program staff	184
MIECHV Professional Well-Being and Workforce Support Survey	Home visiting staff	57
MIECHV DEIB and Well-Being Focus Groups	Home visitors	24
Governor's ECTTF Listening Sessions	Community members	500+
Developmental Health Survey	Family members and early childhood professionals	1,479
Young Families' Experiences of Social Connection Survey	Participants largely represented Kansas demographics; Kansas parents of young children and families residing in rural areas were overrepresented in the sample	1,062
Our Tomorrows: Sensemaking	Low-income individuals whose annual household incomes were \$35,000 or less	214
MCH Home Visiting Workforce Survey	Home visitors and home visiting program supervisors	88 (64 home visitors, 24 supervisors)
Universal Home Visiting Expansion Project (UHVEP) Supervisor Interview/Survey	Program supervisors	13 supervisor interviews; 3 supervisor surveys
UHVEP Family Interviews	Kansas Maternal and Child Health home visiting clients	3
MIECHV Community Readiness Workforce Survey	Home visitors and program supervisors	455 (335 home visitors, 120 supervisors)
KCTTO Facilitated Feedback Sessions	Providers from 21 counties	46
Developmental Health Focus Groups	Parents and caregivers	87
Child Care Provider Experience Mapping	Child care providers	400+
All in for Kansas Kids weekly updates	Early childhood constituents statewide	3,514
All in for Kansas Kids monthly webinars	Early childhood constituents statewide	100 participants per month
KCCTO/Workforce Development Advisory Group Child Care Workforce Survey	Child care professionals	1,660

Table A.3: Percent of Population Under Age 6 by County. U.S. Census Bureau (2022a)

County	% Under Age 6	County	% Under Age 6	County	% Under Age 6
Allen	7.3% - 8.6%	Kearny	8.7% - 13.7%	Marshall	7.3% - 8.6%
Atchison	6.2% - 7.2%	Kiowa	6.2% - 7.2%	Mitchell	7.3% - 8.6%
Barton	7.3% - 8.6%	Lane	6.2% - 7.2%	Morris	6.2% - 7.2%
Bourbon	7.3% - 8.6%	Lincoln	4.9% - 6.1%	Nemaha	7.3% - 8.6%
Cherokee	6.2% - 7.2%	Logan	8.7% - 13.7%	Norton	6.2% - 7.2%
Cowley	6.2% - 7.2%	Meade	7.3% - 8.6%	Ottawa	4.9% - 6.1%
Dickinson	6.2% - 7.2%	Morton	6.2% - 7.2%	Pawnee	4.9% - 6.1%
Ellis	6.2% - 7.2%	Ness	6.2% - 7.2%	Pratt	6.2% - 7.2%
Finney	8.7% - 13.7%	Osborne	7.3% - 8.6%	Republic	6.2% - 7.2%
Ford	8.7% - 13.7%	Phillips	6.2% - 7.2%	Rice	6.2% - 7.2%
Jackson	7.3% - 8.6%	Rawlins	7.3% - 8.6%	Russell	6.2% - 7.2%
Jefferson	6.2% - 7.2%	Rooks	6.2% - 7.2%	Scott	7.3% - 8.6%
Labette	7.3% - 8.6%	Rush	4.9% - 6.1%	Stevens	7.3% - 8.6%
Lyon	6.2% - 7.2%	Sheridan	6.2% - 7.2%	Sumner	6.2% - 7.2%
McPherson	6.2% - 7.2%	Sherman	6.2% - 7.2%	Thomas	7.3% - 8.6%
Neosho	7.3% - 8.6%	Smith	4.9% - 6.1%	Wabaunsee	6.2% - 7.2%
Osage	6.2% - 7.2%	Stafford	7.3% - 8.6%	Washington	7.3% - 8.6%
Pottawatomie	7.3% - 8.6%	Stanton	6.2% - 7.2%	Wilson	6.2% - 7.2%
Seward	8.7% - 13.7%	Trego	6.2% - 7.2%	Woodson	4.9% - 6.1%
Barber	7.3% - 8.6%	Wallace	8.7% - 13.7%	Butler	6.2% - 7.2%
Chase	4.9% - 6.1%	Wichita	7.3% - 8.6%	Crawford	6.2% - 7.2%
Chautauqua	6.2% - 7.2%	Anderson	7.3% - 8.6%	Franklin	6.2% - 7.2%
Cheyenne	7.3% - 8.6%	Brown	7.3% - 8.6%	Gearly	8.7% - 13.7%
Clark	6.2% - 7.2%	Clay	6.2% - 7.2%	Harvey	6.2% - 7.2%
Comanche	4.9% - 6.1%	Cloud	7.3% - 8.6%	Miami	6.2% - 7.2%
Decatur	6.2% - 7.2%	Coffey	4.9% - 6.1%	Montgomery	6.2% - 7.2%
Edwards	6.2% - 7.2%	Doniphan	4.9% - 6.1%	Reno	6.2% - 7.2%
Elk	4.9% - 6.1%	Ellsworth	4.9% - 6.1%	Riley	4.9% - 6.1%
Gove	7.3% - 8.6%	Grant	8.7% - 13.7%	Saline	6.2% - 7.2%
Graham	4.9% - 6.1%	Gray	8.7% - 13.7%	Douglas	4.9% - 6.1%
Greeley	7.3% - 8.6%	Harper	6.2% - 7.2%	Johnson	6.2% - 7.2%
Greenwood	4.9% - 6.1%	Haskell	7.3% - 8.6%	Leavenworth	7.3% - 8.6%
Hamilton	7.3% - 8.6%	Kingman	6.2% - 7.2%	Sedgwick	7.3% - 8.6%
Hodgeman	7.3% - 8.6%	Linn	6.2% - 7.2%	Shawnee	6.2% - 7.2%
Jewell	4.9% - 6.1%	Marion	6.2% - 7.2%	Wyandotte	8.7% - 13.7%

Table A.4: Percent of Children Under 5 in Poverty in Kansas by County, 2017-2021. U.S. Census Bureau (2022a)

County	% in Poverty	County	% in Poverty	County	% in Poverty
Allen	26.8% - 47.7%	Kearny	16.6% - 26.7%	Marshall	7.1% - 16.5%
Atchison	16.6% - 26.7%	Kiowa	0.0% - 7.0%	Mitchell	0.0% - 7.0%
Barton	26.8% - 47.7%	Lane	7.1% - 16.5%	Morris	7.1% - 16.5%
Bourbon	16.6% - 26.7%	Lincoln	16.6% - 26.7%	Nemaha	0.0% - 7.0%
Cherokee	7.1% - 16.5%	Logan	0.0% - 7.0%	Norton	7.1% - 16.5%
Cowley	16.6% - 26.7%	Meade	7.1% - 16.5%	Ottawa	16.6% - 26.7%
Dickinson	0.0% - 7.0%	Morton	7.1% - 16.5%	Pawnee	0.0% - 7.0%
Ellis	16.6% - 26.7%	Ness	7.1% - 16.5%	Pratt	16.6% - 26.7%
Finney	16.6% - 26.7%	Osborne	7.1% - 16.5%	Republic	7.1% - 16.5%
Ford	16.6% - 26.7%	Phillips	16.6% - 26.7%	Rice	16.6% - 26.7%
Jackson	16.6% - 26.7%	Rawlins	16.6% - 26.7%	Russell	26.8% - 47.7%
Jefferson	16.6% - 26.7%	Rooks	0.0% - 7.0%	Scott	7.1% - 16.5%
Labette	16.6% - 26.7%	Rush	0.0% - 7.0%	Stevens	7.1% - 16.5%
Lyon	16.6% - 26.7%	Sheridan	0.0% - 7.0%	Sumner	7.1% - 16.5%
McPherson	0.0% - 7.0%	Sherman	0.0% - 7.0%	Thomas	0.0% - 7.0%
Neosho	16.6% - 26.7%	Smith	7.1% - 16.5%	Wabaunsee	0.0% - 7.0%
Osage	16.6% - 26.7%	Stafford	7.1% - 16.5%	Washington	7.1% - 16.5%
Pottawatomie	7.1% - 16.5%	Stanton	26.8% - 47.7%	Wilson	16.6% - 26.7%
Seward	16.6% - 26.7%	Trego	26.8% - 47.7%	Woodson	7.1% - 16.5%
Barber	26.8% - 47.7%	Wallace	26.8% - 47.7%	Butler	16.6% - 26.7%
Chase	7.1% - 16.5%	Wichita	26.8% - 47.7%	Crawford	16.6% - 26.7%
Chautauqua	16.6% - 26.7%	Anderson	7.1% - 16.5%	Franklin	7.1% - 16.5%
Cheyenne	26.8% - 47.7%	Brown	26.8% - 47.7%	Geary	26.8% - 47.7%
Clark	16.6% - 26.7%	Clay	16.6% - 26.7%	Harvey	7.1% - 16.5%
Comanche	0.0% - 7.0%	Cloud	0.0% - 7.0%	Miami	0.0% - 7.0%
Decatur	16.6% - 26.7%	Coffey	16.6% - 26.7%	Montgomery	26.8% - 47.7%
Edwards	0.0% - 7.0%	Doniphan	16.6% - 26.7%	Reno	16.6% - 26.7%
Elk	26.8% - 47.7%	Ellsworth	7.1% - 16.5%	Riley	7.1% - 16.5%
Gove	0.0% - 7.0%	Grant	7.1% - 16.5%	Saline	7.1% - 16.5%
Graham	7.1% - 16.5%	Gray	0.0% - 7.0%	Douglas	7.1% - 16.5%
Greeley	0.0% - 7.0%	Harper	26.8% - 47.7%	Johnson	0.0% - 7.0%
Greenwood	16.6% - 26.7%	Haskell	16.6% - 26.7%	Leavenworth	7.1% - 16.5%
Hamilton	0.0% - 7.0%	Kingman	16.6% - 26.7%	Sedgwick	16.6% - 26.7%
Hodgeman	16.6% - 26.7%	Linn	7.1% - 16.5%	Shawnee	16.6% - 26.7%
Jewell	16.6% - 26.7%	Marion	7.1% - 16.5%	Wyandotte	26.8% - 47.7%

Table A.5: Percent of Children Served by County. *Distinct Count of Children Data Dashboard*

County	% Served	County	% Served	County	% Served
Allen	62.8% - 80.6%	Kearny	46.5% - 62.7%	Marshall	80.7% - 100.0%
Atchison	23.4% - 46.4%	Kiowa	46.5% - 62.7%	Mitchell	80.7% - 100.0%
Barton	62.8% - 80.6%	Lane	80.7% - 100.0%	Morris	46.5% - 62.7%
Bourbon	23.4% - 46.4%	Lincoln	62.8% - 80.6%	Nemaha	62.8% - 80.6%
Cherokee	46.5% - 62.7%	Logan	80.7% - 100.0%	Norton	80.7% - 100.0%
Cowley	23.4% - 46.4%	Meade	46.5% - 62.7%	Ottawa	80.7% - 100.0%
Dickinson	62.8% - 80.6%	Morton	23.4% - 46.4%	Pawnee	80.7% - 100.0%
Ellis	62.8% - 80.6%	Ness	62.8% - 80.6%	Pratt	46.5% - 62.7%
Finney	46.5% - 62.7%	Osborne	62.8% - 80.6%	Republic	62.8% - 80.6%
Ford	23.4% - 46.4%	Phillips	80.7% - 100.0%	Rice	46.5% - 62.7%
Jackson	46.5% - 62.7%	Rawlins	46.5% - 62.7%	Russell	62.8% - 80.6%
Jefferson	80.7% - 100.0%	Rooks	62.8% - 80.6%	Scott	62.8% - 80.6%
Labette	46.5% - 62.7%	Rush	46.5% - 62.7%	Stevens	23.4% - 46.4%
Lyon	62.8% - 80.6%	Sheridan	80.7% - 100.0%	Sumner	46.5% - 62.7%
McPherson	62.8% - 80.6%	Sherman	62.8% - 80.6%	Thomas	80.7% - 100.0%
Neosho	62.8% - 80.6%	Smith	80.7% - 100.0%	Wabaunsee	46.5% - 62.7%
Osage	46.5% - 62.7%	Stafford	46.5% - 62.7%	Washington	62.8% - 80.6%
Pottawatomie	46.5% - 62.7%	Stanton	62.8% - 80.6%	Wilson	23.4% - 46.4%
Seward	23.4% - 46.4%	Trego	80.7% - 100.0%	Woodson	46.5% - 62.7%
Barber	46.5% - 62.7%	Wallace	23.4% - 46.4%	Butler	23.4% - 46.4%
Chase	46.5% - 62.7%	Wichita	23.4% - 46.4%	Crawford	80.7% - 100.0%
Chautauqua	23.4% - 46.4%	Anderson	23.4% - 46.4%	Franklin	46.5% - 62.7%
Cheyenne	46.5% - 62.7%	Brown	46.5% - 62.7%	Gearly	23.4% - 46.4%
Clark	46.5% - 62.7%	Clay	62.8% - 80.6%	Harvey	23.4% - 46.4%
Comanche	62.8% - 80.6%	Cloud	80.7% - 100.0%	Miami	46.5% - 62.7%
Decatur	62.8% - 80.6%	Coffey	62.8% - 80.6%	Montgomery	46.5% - 62.7%
Edwards	46.5% - 62.7%	Doniphan	46.5% - 62.7%	Reno	46.5% - 62.7%
Elk	23.4% - 46.4%	Ellsworth	80.7% - 100.0%	Riley	46.5% - 62.7%
Gove	62.8% - 80.6%	Grant	23.4% - 46.4%	Saline	62.8% - 80.6%
Graham	80.7% - 100.0%	Gray	23.4% - 46.4%	Douglas	46.5% - 62.7%
Greeley	62.8% - 80.6%	Harper	62.8% - 80.6%	Johnson	46.5% - 62.7%
Greenwood	46.5% - 62.7%	Haskell	46.5% - 62.7%	Leavenworth	23.4% - 46.4%
Hamilton	46.5% - 62.7%	Kingman	23.4% - 46.4%	Sedgwick	23.4% - 46.4%
Hodgeman	23.4% - 46.4%	Linn	23.4% - 46.4%	Shawnee	46.5% - 62.7%
Jewell	46.5% - 62.7%	Marion	62.8% - 80.6%	Wyandotte	23.4% - 46.4%

Table A.6: Population Density Classifications in Kansas by County.

County	% Served	County	% Served	County	% Served
Allen	77.3	Greeley	86.4	Osborne	97.2
Anderson	84.5	Greenwood	93.1	Ottawa	77.9
Atchison	67.8	Hamilton	74.8	Pawnee	62.1
Barber	95.4	Harper	92	Phillips	90.5
Barton	81.8	Harvey	79.2	Pottawatomie	79.5
Bourbon	84.8	Haskell	76.9	Pratt	82.8
Brown	89.7	Hodgeman	85.5	Rawlins	105.4
Butler	69.2	Jackson	80.8	Reno	74.2
Chase	77.6	Jefferson	72.7	Republic	96.1
Chautauqua	90.5	Jewell	111.8	Rice	77
Cherokee	74.8	Johnson	65	Riley	35.9
Cheyenne	93.5	Kearny	84.2	Rooks	83.8
Clark	85.2	Kingman	74.5	Rush	84.6
Clay	89.4	Kiowa	89.4	Russell	88
Cloud	80.2	Labette	80.2	Saline	72.7
Coffey	78.9	Lane	92.6	Scott	84.9
Comanche	94.6	Leavenworth	65.3	Sedgwick	68.4
Cowley	72.7	Lincoln	93.4	Seward	72.4
Crawford	60.8	Linn	79.5	Shawnee	73.3
Decatur	99.2	Logan	85.1	Sheridan	93.1
Dickinson	77.6	Lyon	62.3	Sherman	81.2
Doniphan	70.7	Marion	81.8	Smith	98.8
Douglas	45.3	Marshall	87.6	Stafford	87.6
Edwards	79.6	McPherson	73	Stanton	86.6
Elk	102.4	Meade	80.8	Stevens	81.8
Ellis	57.7	Miami	71.5	Sumner	79.5
Ellsworth	67.8	Mitchell	89.4	Thomas	75.1
Finney	71.2	Montgomery	79.9	Trego	82.5
Ford	70.4	Morris	87.3	Wabaunsee	81.5
Franklin	69.5	Morton	83.8	Wallace	103
Geary	69.2	Nemaha	86.9	Washington	90.8
Gove	94.9	Neosho	80.8	Wichita	94.5
Graham	94.1	Ness	88	Wilson	89.4
Grant	80.2	Norton	65.6	Woodson	83.5
Gray	80.5	Osage	77.3	Wyandotte	68.6

Table A.7: Dependent Population per 100 People Age 18 to 64 in Kansas by County, 2022.

County	% Served	County	% Served	County	% Served
Allen	25.1	Greeley	1.6	Osborne	3.9
Anderson	13.4	Greenwood	5.2	Ottawa	8
Atchison	37.4	Hamilton	2.4	Pawnee	8.2
Barber	3.6	Harper	6.6	Phillips	5.4
Barton	28	Harvey	62.6	Pottawatomie	31.2
Bourbon	22.8	Haskell	6.2	Pratt	12.3
Brown	16.4	Hodgeman	2	Rawlins	2.4
Butler	47.7	Jackson	20.2	Reno	49
Chase	3.3	Jefferson	34.4	Republic	6.5
Chautauqua	5.3	Jewell	3.2	Rice	13
Cherokee	32.5	Johnson	1,307.30	Riley	116.6
Cheyenne	2.5	Kearny	4.4	Rooks	5.4
Clark	2	Kingman	8.3	Rush	4.1
Clay	12.5	Kiowa	3.3	Russell	7.5
Cloud	12.5	Labette	30.6	Saline	74.4
Coffey	13.2	Lane	2.2	Scott	7
Comanche	2.1	Leavenworth	178.9	Sedgwick	527.1
Cowley	30.6	Lincoln	4	Seward	33.4
Crawford	66.3	Linn	16.5	Shawnee	326.2
Decatur	3	Logan	2.5	Sheridan	2.7
Dickinson	21.8	Lyon	37.6	Sherman	5.5
Doniphan	18.9	Marion	12.6	Smith	3.9
Douglas	263.2	Marshall	11.1	Stafford	5
Edwards	4.4	McPherson	33.4	Stanton	2.9
Elk	3.8	Meade	4	Stevens	7.1
Ellis	32.2	Miami	60.5	Sumner	19
Ellsworth	8.9	Mitchell	8.2	Thomas	7.3
Finney	28.9	Montgomery	48.2	Trego	3.1
Ford	30.8	Morris	7.7	Wabaunsee	8.8
Franklin	45.5	Morton	3.6	Wallace	1.6
Geary	92.8	Nemaha	14.1	Washington	6.1
Gove	2.5	Neosho	27.3	Wichita	2.9
Graham	2.7	Ness	2.5	Wilson	15.1
Grant	12.5	Norton	6	Woodson	6.2
Gray	6.6	Osage	22.2	Wyandotte	1,093.01

Source: Institute for Policy & Social Research, The University of Kansas; data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2022.

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