



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Annual Report of the State Early Childhood Advisory Council

*ASPIRING FOR GREATNESS:
Leaving a Legacy Upon Which to Build*



December 2011

SECAC-MS VISION

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

Accomplishments of the Council in Meeting 2010 Recommendations

The SECAC of Mississippi has focused on five areas of work that it believes will support and stabilize the early childhood education system in the state and set in process permanent relationships/collaborations between the state agencies that serve children and families.

Data System

SECAC is working the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) at Mississippi State University for the purpose of expanding the state's longitudinal data system to include more data on early childhood education programs, providers, quality elements and children who attend. The purpose of the data collection is to allow the Council and other entities to ascertain specific characteristics about children and families so the planning for future interventions and targets will be data driven and more accurate. In 2012, SECAC plans to commission nSPARC to do a study of the 10 lowest performing school districts with data on children's environments, resources, and teacher qualifications, etc.

Coordinated Services Models

Public Consulting Group (PCG) of Nashville, TN, was awarded a contract from the MS Dept. of Human Services to construct models for optimizing early childhood education, health and well-being services in Mississippi. The models will be piloted in MS communities in 2012.

Home Provider Registry

A voluntary registry of in-home child care providers has been developed by the Nurturing Homes Initiative project at MSU-Extension Service. Currently, there are over 700 providers registered, and the Nurturing Homes Initiative will continue the recruitment process into 2013.

Workforce Development

A career ladder for early care and education teachers has been designed along with a method of providing compensation for career advancements. This is currently being piloted through the Allies project at the MS Center for Education Innovation with 70 childcare teachers in the Hinds/Rankin County area.

Health Access Study

A review of state health resources and practices for children is being conducted by the PCG group for the purpose of streamlining and justifying the need for health service providers in areas of the state identified as in critical need with the final report due in April 2012.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BEYOND 2011

- Provide resources annually to early care and education programs so they will meet Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System standards at a minimum of a step three of the five step rating system.
- Further increase opportunities for children birth to three years of age of low-income families to participate in high quality community based in-home early childhood education programs.
- Align the early learning standards (0-4 years) and core state standards for kindergarten–grade 12 by 2012.
- Develop and disseminate a curriculum that reflects the newly revised and aligned learning standards 0 through 5 years of age.
- Increase funding to the *Nurturing Homes Initiative*, a program funded by the Mississippi Department of Human Services, to provide registration services and technical assistance to teachers in non-licensed family child care homes for the purpose of improving the educational quality of the program offered to children in those settings by December 2012.
- Develop and implement a plan by 2015 that would eventually require all licensed early care and education centers to participate in the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System that includes a financial plan for implementation and maintenance.
- Continue production and dissemination by the MS Child Care Resource and Referral Network of a newborn calendar that is currently available to all parents through the Governor's Office and the MS Department of Education upon the birth of their baby for the purpose of providing them with developmental milestones and other information helpful to them as their child's first teacher.
- Develop an implementation plan by 2014 to address access to health services for young children to include reduction in redundancies in paperwork and conflicting regulations for eligibility across multiple programs, review of the feasibility and cost effectiveness of adjusting state policies and practices to meet national standards and/or to reduce redundancy and conflicting requirements, service gaps in remote areas of the state and use of alternate measures such as telemedicine, mobile units or patient navigators.
- Develop and implement training modules to enhance the knowledge of health care professionals about specific needs and concerns for young children and their families by 2012.
- Conduct a review of existing preventative health services by 2013, including the state vaccination program, medical home model and Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT), to identify barriers to participation and to suggest strategies to encourage and promote the accessibility and use of preventive health care.

- Support the implementation of a scientifically sound population based measure of school readiness that encompasses all developmental domains and is linked to the State's Longitudinal Data System.
- Develop a plan for using the population-based assessment data to raise awareness about early childhood development, engage a broader group of stakeholders and inform the SECAC's planning and decision-making.

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

The MS State Early Childhood Advisory Council has worked diligently over the past four years to create a plan by which early care and education services are coordinated through a statewide system that focuses on young children and their families. This work has resulted in solid agency collaborations and a Mississippi early childhood agenda, which is at the forefront of state policy and community awareness. Regardless of the success in securing future federal funding, the Council will continue to provide support and recommendations to improve early care and education programs and the system which supports those programs.