



State Early Childhood Advisory Council of MISSISSIPPI

SECAC ANNUAL COMMITTEE REPORT: 2014-2015

Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this report is to share the accomplishments and goals of the committees of Mississippi's State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC). The MS SECAC seeks to establish a higher quality early childhood (EC) system that will meet the educational and developmental needs of Mississippi's children. Members work together to develop a strategic plan to coordinate efforts, programs and resources supporting children birth to five years, and to identify opportunities for and barriers to collaboration and coordination among programs and agencies.

The MS SECAC began the 2014-2015 year with six functional committees: Data Systems, KRA, Professional Development and Workforce, Standards, QRS and Engagement and Partnerships. During the year, the Council made the decision to incorporate the work scope of the Engagement and Partnerships committee into the remaining five committees. What follows is a series of reports supplied by each of SECAC's five committee chairs and includes each committee's accomplishments and recommendations for future activities.¹

SECAC Committee Reports

Data Systems Committee

1. Identify and define the current early childhood system in the state. For this activity, the first step was to identify all the early childhood care and education programs in the state. This led to the development of the "rainbow" document, a list of programs managed and housed by specific state agencies. The next step was to develop a more articulate inventory of all early childhood services and the domains under which they fall. We identified three major domains: (1) early learning and development, (2) health, and (3) family leadership and support. We also identified the early childhood delivery structure in the state, which includes private childcare providers, Head Start, public pre-K, and home care. This activity is at the core of building a robust EC data system (Goal 6). With a survey of SECAC members to determine the importance of information to stakeholders in the development of a statewide early childhood data system, the committee also identified some key policy questions that are relevant for organizing data and presented these survey results before the council.

Recommendation: The key to develop a data system that is actionable is to identify a much broader framework that promotes the three major umbrellas of early childhood care and development: (1) early learning and development, (2) health, and (3) family leadership and support. Without a clear conceptual framework that fits in a much broader policy perspective, it would be very difficult to develop indicators that can be actionable, that is, indicators that can help improve the delivery of early childhood programs in the state. This step is relevant to developing data tools, such as dashboards, that can inform the discussion on continuing improvement in early childhood.

¹ See Appendix A: Survey Questions.



2. Secure funding for an integrated, coordinated early childhood data system. A proposal was submitted and funded for \$3 million. This funding is going to help bring together early childhood data to address the following state system-related objectives of the Data Committee:

- Establish an integrated, coordinated early childhood data system that facilitates the following:
 - a. Allowing administrators, teachers, and officials to understand which early interventions work best under differing circumstances to track and support individual children's education progress.
 - b. Cross-support service integration to help young children and their families have access to consistently available and high-quality services to early child development.
- Establish a clear link between the Early Childhood Data Network and the SLDS to analyze long-term outcomes for children.

The system proposed in the grant connects with every SECAC goal, as it will help understand how the quality of childcare, teachers, and community environment influences early childhood outcomes. It will also help us understand how other factors, such as standards and family involvement, influence the lasting effects of early childhood care and education.

Recommendation: The state has to move to create system-wide data governance under a well-defined framework for early childhood in the state (as discussed in the recommendation for Activity 1 above).

3. Draft project work plan for data portal. This activity simply outlines the communication plan, development strategy, capacity and resources, and initial tasks for the establishment of a data portal. This activity is not directly related to any of the goals. This activity is more related to setting up an operational plan for the realization of an early childhood data portal.

Recommendation: Moving forward, the state must have the buy-in and commitment that data are going to be a part of the state strategy for continual improvement and evaluation of early childhood care and education programs.

4. Introduce the importance of data governance. The committee recommended that SECAC as a whole should be the data governing body. The committee also recommended a data council for the implementation of the grant as described in Activity 2. This activity is not directly related to any of the goals. However, the goals can be seen as general guidance to the establishment of rules and regulations in regard to the appropriate use of early childhood data.

Recommendation: Moving forward, governance should be a part of a much larger discussion around a well-defined framework for early childhood in the state. It goes back to the idea of creating actionable indicators directly linked to specific functions of the system, as defined by the agreed-upon framework that SECAC needs to establish.

Priorities that need to continue into 2015–2016: The most important activity is governance (for access, use, and management of data system) and data modeling around an agreed-upon framework, with clear articulation of accountability and authority. Other important activities include:

1. Adopt what will be the fundamental elements of an early childhood data system using the results of the policy question survey to inform the development.
2. Evaluate the readiness, practicality, and capacity of sources to provide desired data in an accurate and timely fashion.

Additional information from the committee: The committee set forth the rationale for needing data in the first place by exploring how certain early childhood research questions could be answered through linkages. The committee also promoted 10 fundamental elements of an effective data system.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) Committee

1. Administering first statewide Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and using data to drive instruction.

The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will provide parents, teachers, and early childhood providers with a common understanding of what children know and are able to do upon entering school. The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment will also be used to measure how well Pre-K programs prepare four-year-olds to be ready for kindergarten based upon the Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children. Administered for the first time during the 2014-2015 school term, the primary purpose of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is to improve the quality of classroom instruction and other services provided to students from birth to 3rd grade. Fall 2014 results indicated that 34.6% of students were not ready for Kindergarten. Spring 2015 results indicated that 56.4% of students were classified as transitional readers - beginning to read unfamiliar words and easy reader material. Results from the assessment are informing professional development opportunities for 2015-2016. This activity connected directly with Goal 4, to “improve knowledge among early elementary teachers, EC programs, parents and policy-makers on the implications for child outcomes on the statewide kindergarten assessment.”

Recommendation: The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment provides valuable information to the state’s teachers, parents, and educational leaders as we work to improve early childhood outcomes for students.

2. Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators. The purpose of the professional development is to improve classroom instruction across the state. Based on feedback from classroom teachers and the results of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, professional development modules were scheduled across the state for Pre-K and K teachers, as well as other elementary teachers. Collaboration among state agencies allowed for sharing of resources and a more uniform message. Topics scheduled for 2015-2016 include the following:

- Leading Pre-K Teachers: An Administrator’s Guide
- Math and Learning Centers
- Assessment in the Early Childhood Classroom
- Kindergarten Readiness
- Differentiated Learning
- Teaching Strategies in the Pre-K Classroom
- Including Children with Disabilities in the Pre-K Classroom
- Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Olds
- Collaborating with Parents
- Early Childhood Literacy
- Technology and Science
- Pre-K LETRS

This activity connected with Goal 1 and Goal 3, which focus on improving and expanding use of the EC standards and on professional development.

Recommendation: Professional development for teachers should be a central component to improving outcomes. It should be focused and ongoing in content and delivery.

3. Training Modules for Parents. Modules have been developed to engage parents on such topics as the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment, the Early Learning Standards, early literacy development, and hands-on learning activities. Modules are available through several state agencies, including the Mississippi Department of Education, the Early Years Network, and Mississippi Public Broadcasting. This activity connected to Goal 4 and Goal 5, related to use of the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and improved stakeholder engagement.

Recommendation: Similar to professional development for teachers, continued engagement of parents is essential to creating opportunities for high-quality early childhood experiences in Mississippi. While a single early childhood system is not in place, the work among several agencies to create and share modules is a positive step toward supporting parents across the state as they serve as first teachers.

No additional priorities were identified to continue into 2015–2016.

Additional information from committee: The collaboration among state agencies and stakeholders has expanded in recent years. The work of the committee was accomplished through this unified effort - a key component for future success.

Professional Development & Workforce Committee

- 1. Develop and conduct a workforce needs assessment.** The committee gathered information about the current resources for early childhood development professional development. The committee also gathered all of the data with directors' and teachers' credentials and presented to SECAC in a map. The committee requested the number of graduates from ECE 2-year and 4-year programs from LifeTracks; however, it was incomplete, therefore another request is being made. Data from T.E.A.C.H. was also considered; however, T.E.A.C.H. lost funding in the state; therefore, no need to move further.

The picture of the current workforce in the state is needed to plan for career pathways.

Recommendations: When the 2-year and 4-year data is complete, another map can be created for this year. This assessment should be updated on a regular basis for planning purposes.

- 2. Improve alignment of credentialing between 2 and 4 year institutions.** Complete a state policy scan on articulation agreements: This was completed. Committee agreed to model Texas system. We created a sub-committee including representatives from 2- and 4-year to advise and guide alignment process. The Committee and subcommittee held a session on August 4th to all interested faculty for input and guidance. A seamless curriculum is critical for continued professional development and a higher quality workforce.

Recommendations: Next step is to create a toolkit for providers and students to use with our current system in place. Also, the committee was charged to investigate placement status of the ECE technical degree graduate. This came from August 4th meeting. In addition, committee should continue to recommend and encourage the pilots of an inverted curriculum or 2+2 programs.

No additional priorities were identified to continue into 2015–2016.

No additional information from committee.

Standards Committee

- 1. Survey of providers to inform the development of an engagement plan around the Early Learning Standards.** The purpose of this activity was to gather information on how child care directors gathered and used information that is provided by agencies throughout the State. Barriers that we encountered were slim; the process was handled by nSPARC and was very well organized. nSPARC developed the survey and distributed survey to licensed childcare providers - online and phone. 82 percent of the surveyed providers reported using the standards and find them to be helpful. The 18 percent who don't use the standards reported that they didn't use the standards because they weren't required to do so. nSPARC discovered that, in some cases, a large number of directors did not answer certain questions. They had to go back and account for these responses to make sure the data is represented as clearly and accurately as possible. A full survey report will be distributed at the October SECAC meeting. Our goal for this year was to improve and expand the use of the statewide early childhood standards. By constructing the survey, we were able to determine how many providers utilize them. The survey will also help improve and expand the use of the statewide early childhood standards and guidelines that are aligned with K-3 standards and serve as the basis for all early childhood programs in Mississippi.

Recommendation: Distribute the standards and formulate a way to reach all providers through different agencies and develop a sustainability plan to ensure that the standards and a curriculum guide are being utilized. Additional recommendations will be clear when the full report is released.

- 2. Establish a standard template(s) “report card” for students moving into kindergarten available to all providers.** The purpose of this activity was to formulate a report card that will be used to create a seamless transition from an early child care setting to a public school setting. The committee postponed this activity until after the completion of the survey report.

Recommendation: The report card issue must be elevated through MDE and a method of a standard design statewide must be established to ensure transition and alignment from Pre-k through 3rd grade. This should be considered and completed after the final provider survey report is complete.

No additional priorities were identified to continue into 2015–2016.

No additional information from committee.

Quality Rating System (QRS) Committee

- 1. Planning and Launching Listening Session Tour.** The QRS determined that in order to better understand provider needs related to the current QRS, a statewide Listening Session should be launched to hear from providers first hand. From October 2014 to January 2015, the QRS Committee planned and launched the Listening Session Tour. Some planning activities included determining questions the Committee would pose to providers, determining the format of the sessions and the role SECAC members would play, drafting publication materials and locking in the dates and location of tour stops. These decisions were made in a series of teleconferences and follow-up email correspondence. An important part of planning was a “Pilot Session” in Tupelo during October. This sort of planning was necessary for the Listening Tour to be successful. The questions posed to providers allow the Committee to present to Council what sort of needs and expectations should be considered moving into the Revision process. They narrowed the scope of discussion, which ultimately facilitates more precise information. The Pilot session allowed the Committee to trial the Committee’s ideas and to further refine the scope of Committee goals. Mindfulness of publication materials ensured a consistent and clear message about the Tour and SECAC’s goals for the public. The publication strategy maximized public participation.

Recommendation: It seems appropriate to set new goals entirely as the Council continues to take steps toward larger goals.

- 2. Conduct 6-8 open-access listening sessions around the State.** From January 2015 until July 2015, Listening Sessions were held in 8 cities throughout Mississippi. Biloxi, Jackson, Hattiesburg, Oxford, McComb, Greenville, Meridian, and Vicksburg each hosted a meeting. The format was semi-structured Q&A. Providers were prompted to respond to the list of questions developed in Committee. The information gleaned from these sessions is the substance of the report delivered to Council regarding provider needs and expectations related to QRS.

No recommendations.

- 3. Deliver summary of input from listening sessions to SECAC.** During the Listening Session Tour, the Technical Assistance team conducted a qualitative research project in order to ensure the production of an accurate summary of input from providers. Each session was recorded, the conversation transcribed, and the text coded for analysis. A report describing the findings was developed by the Technical Assistance team and presented to Council. The report presents findings which emerged from a systematic analysis of providers’ responses and conversations during the Listening Sessions. The information in the report should enable the Council to make decisions moving forward that consider the needs and expectations of the workforce that is impacted by QRS.

Recommendation: These findings should inform the decision-making of the Council as members move forward with the revision of QRS.

Priorities that need to continue into 2015-2016: One deliverable was not accomplished: “Develop a list of key stakeholders from listening sessions for future input into QRS revisions.” The Council should consider naming individuals who should be involved in the QRS revision process.

No additional information from committee.

Committee Recommendations

As a part of the annual reporting, each committee chair was asked to make recommendations to support the future planning of the Council and the Councils’ committees, including issues or needs within Mississippi’s early childhood system, suggested activities, and ideas for ways in which to structure the committees of SECAC.

Priorities for 2015–2016

- Figure out how to bridge early childcare with early education. There is the erroneous assumption that early education has always been ages 0-8. That is not the case. For many years, we have had early care 0-4 and then early education as part of the pre-K-12 system. It is very important that we make it clear that we have to be able to bridge the world of early care with the world of early education. The key is to create a framework that fits the needs of Mississippi so that the two worlds can be brought together effectively through emphasis on intentional transition and alignment activities.
- The lack of a formal structure to the state’s early childhood efforts have been noted as a negative factor in grant applications.
- Create a sustainable and educated work force.
- ECE completely funded.
- Lack of funding.
- Mississippi needs to seriously consider the possibility of 4-year-olds joining the compulsory education system. If pre-K is ultimately going to be mandatory the way K-12 is, what are the implications for system-building in the mean time? Mississippi should be building an EC system that is sustainable and would support this mandate in the future.

Recommendations for Priorities for Council Activities

- The biggest priority of all is to have a sense of a well-defined statewide system supported by legislation and resources. SECAC must see the creation of the early childhood data system through to completion; monitor for fidelity to fundamentals, completion, and accuracy; and modify components as necessary to maintain relevance to decision makers.
- Explore a more cohesive system or structure for Mississippi’s early childhood work.
- Secure funding for statewide pre-k collaboratives and funding for a similar program to T.E.A.C.H. and Wages.
- Work to establish more cohesiveness amongst the early childhood establishments.
- If the state prefers providers have a college degree, there needs to be pathways for average folks to accomplish that. Mississippi must approach professionalization of the EC workforce with intention.

Recommendations for Committee Structure

- Articulate the priorities of the Council clearly before yearly planning so that committee planning.
- Change the structure so is limited to two or three functional committees.
- Having representatives from across agencies and offices on each committee works well. We should considering collapsing some of the committees (for instance, KRA might collapse into the data system committee).

- Committees not Council need to be meeting every month. There is no need in this much time being committed.
- It's nice to have a chair and two co-chairs.
- Committees should meet bi-monthly rather than monthly.
- Technical assistance is essential.
- Fewer Committees with more accountable committee chairs. It would be very functional to have Council meetings every other month and working committee meetings in between; still mandatory and structured, in the same time and place as larger Council meetings.

Appendix A - Survey Questions

Section 1: Committee Activities

For up to four key activities, Committee Chairs or Co-chairs were asked to respond to the follow questions:

1. Name of Activity
2. Description of the Activity
 - What is the purpose of this activity? What steps were taken to complete the activity? What was the outcome of the activity (i.e. recommendation or report to SECAC, change in direction, discontinued, etc.)? What barriers did you encounter? What recommendations were made to SECAC based on the activity?
3. How did this activity connect to the SECAC goals for the year?
4. What recommendations do you have for the future use of or continuation of this activity?

Section 2: Additional Comments

1. What additional information would you like to share about your committee's work this year that was not captured as part of the activity reports?
2. What committee activities were not accomplished or not addressed that need to continue?

Section 3: Overall Reflections

1. As this year is coming to a close, what do you know now that you wish you had known at the beginning of the year?
2. What about SECAC committee structure and functioning works well and should be continued?
3. What suggestions for improvement do you have for committee structure and functioning?
4. What are the current early childhood issues in Mississippi that SECAC should be aware of and discussing in the coming year?
5. Shortly, the Council will be thinking about their activities for the coming year. What recommendations do you have for priorities to be addressed?

For more information, please contact:

State Early Childhood Advisory Council • Office of the Governor
Laurie J. Smith, Ph.D., Policy Advisor/Executive Director, SECAC
P.O. Box 139, Jackson, MS 39205
601-576-2010 (phone) • 601-576-2791 (fax)
laurie.smith@governor.ms.gov