

EARLY

Childhood

2009
ANNUAL REPORT

MINNESOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL



Supported by Minnesota Department of Education
Minnesota Department of Human Services

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Minnesota Statutes §3.187 requires the following:

“A report to the legislature must contain, at the beginning of the report, the cost of preparing the report, including any costs incurred by another agency or another level of government.”

The following provides estimated costs incurred in the preparation of this report.

This report provides information that the Department of Education already collects as part of its normal business functions. The cost information reported below does not include the cost of gathering and analyzing the data but rather is limited to the estimated cost of actually preparing this report document.

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[Click here for the Early Childhood Advisory Council Website](#)

Letter from Chair

Governor of Minnesota
Room 130 Capitol Building
75 Constitution Avenue
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Governor Pawlenty:

The Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) has been working to meet its goal of creating a high-quality early childhood system in Minnesota in order to improve the educational outcomes of children so that all children are school-ready by 2020. The Council strives to make action oriented recommendations that are supported by early childhood research and will make a substantial, positive difference in the lives of Minnesota's young children.

The Council was formed in December 2008, and in six months has completed a significant body of work designed to establish goals and set parameters for the next 3 ½ years. The Council is working to balance being pragmatic while making advances in a timely fashion. This report contains a status report on the work done thus far. We have:

- Adopted bylaws.
- Reviewed our goals as directed by state and federal statutes.
- Articulated our vision for the Council.
- Viewed over 150 applications for committee participation.
- Reviewed reports on federal stimulus funding, state legislative initiatives, important state-wide projects.
- Developed our goal and guiding principles and draft of a strategic plan.

I want to express my gratitude to council members who are dedicated to working on the important issues facing the field of early childhood care and education. We realize solutions are complex and require the integration of systems beyond the reach of the Council. There are many Minnesotans who are passionate about this work including parents, providers, employers, elected officials and much of the general public. We have invited those interested to join us in our work.

I hope you will find this report to be useful and informative. I am grateful for the state and national attention being paid to the importance of early learning. As we enter the next phase of our work we will focus on making recommendations informed by public input, to advance the early care and education of young children in Minnesota. I hope we can meet in the next few months to discuss the progress of the Council and to ensure we are meeting your vision for the young children in Minnesota. I am happy to be a part of this work and thank you for your support of our efforts.

Sincerely,

Sarah Caruso
Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council, Chair

I. Purpose of the Report

This report summarizes the goals and achievements of the Governor's appointed Early Childhood Advisory Council from July 2008 through June 2009, as required by the [Governor's Executive Order 08-14](#).

II. Background

Recent research emphasizes the importance of growth and development in the early years. Researchers have found that brains develop over time but a great deal of development takes place in the early years. Pathways in the brain solidify through early interactions with people and the environment. When children lack early experiences that support their growth and development they are at-risk for future learning difficulties. Factors which might cause a child to be at-risk include, but are not limited to, poverty, homelessness and parents with low level of education.

While all children benefit from high-quality early childhood care and education programs, the impact is even greater for those children who are at-risk of school failure. We also know providing conditions for healthy brain development for at-risk children during the preschool years is more cost-effective than playing catch-up in later years.

Minnesota has done much to support the development of young children. Advocates have outlined the components of a broad early childhood system of programs and services including early learning, health, early intervention and family support. The Minnesota Legislature established the Minnesota Early Childhood Caucus in 2002 to work on a bipartisan and bicameral basis. This caucus works to bring statewide coherence and improves statewide capacity in programs that impact Minnesota's youngest citizens. Publicly funded programs provide services to children and families. A professional development system and career lattice is being created for adults who care for and educate young children. Minnesota has two sets of child outcome standards: the [Early Childhood Indicators of Progress Minnesota's Early Learning Standards](#) and [Early Childhood Indicators of Progress Minnesota's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to 3](#). The standards were developed by the Departments of Education, Human Services and Health and are used by early childhood care and education personnel and policymakers.

Privately funded initiatives are doing innovative work in communities throughout the state. In February, 2008, a small group of Minnesota based foundations and funders, agreed to work together to fund a comprehensive business plan. Groups, such as the Minnesota Initiative Foundations and Minnesota Early Learning Foundation, are piloting new programs. Coalitions are being built in communities of all sizes. Parent Aware is a quality rating system being piloted that rates the quality of early childhood care and education programs and provides supports for providers to improve quality. Scholarships and allowances are being piloted as new methods of portable funding.

These current initiatives provide a strong foundation on which to build. Further efforts require a strong infrastructure that helps coordinate programs, takes promising projects to scale, and provides the supports needed for continuous improvement. Continued efforts are needed to support the needs of children most at-risk of coming to Kindergarten unprepared.

The Minnesota School Readiness Study, an annual report done by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) consistently shows that some children, especially children from families with low incomes and low levels of maternal education, are not yet demonstrating proficiency in the five areas of development studied. An improvement in proficiency by these children at kindergarten entrance would help reduce Minnesota's achievement gap.

The 10 Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs (see Section V) were defined by early childhood experts at the Minnesota Governor's Summit on School Readiness held in 2006. The elements are well grounded in scientific research. Unfortunately, not enough of Minnesota's programs are able to incorporate all ten elements. The Council hopes to increase the number of early childhood care and education programs in the state that demonstrate the essential elements so that more children will experience the high-quality programming they need to be ready for school.

Using the ten essential elements will guide the Council as it works to ensure children attend high-quality early childhood programs. In addition, the Council has identified a number of key issues to examine as it develops an early childhood system in Minnesota in order to improve the educational outcomes of children so that all children are school-ready by 2020. Steps the Council has taken as well as priorities for next steps are outlined below.

III. Key Issues Facing Early Childhood Care and Education in Minnesota

One of the first things the Council discussed was priorities for the important work ahead. Discussions centered on children, programs and services and support systems. The outcome of discussions set the direction for the strategic plan and set the stage for committee work. The conclusions are embedded in the ensuing work of the Council and are articulated in the Executive Summary of Priorities (see Appendix B). Many important items were raised as a result of these discussions including key issues, strengths and opportunities and early childhood care and education programs that are currently supported by public funding. These are listed below.

A. Issues

Key issues facing early childhood care and education that were identified by council members include:

- Children who are at-risk.
- Fragility of early childhood workforce.
- Multiple needs of children and families.
- Turf issues between programs; program and resource guarding.
- Multiple efforts moving in different directions.
- Funding limitations.

B. Strengths and Opportunities

Key strengths and opportunities in early childhood care and education that were identified by council members include:

- Awareness of importance of birth to 5 years for healthy growth and development.
- Successful programs already developed.
- Early learning standards in place.
- Momentum at state and national levels.
- Opportunity to learn from Minnesota's pilot projects and initiatives; and from other states.

C. Current Key Early Childhood Care and Education Programs and Services

Programs and services supported by state or federal funding under the auspice of the Departments of Education and Human Services.

MDE

- Infant and Toddler Intervention (PartC)
- Preschool Special Education
- Early Childhood Family Education
- Head Start
- Even Start

School Readiness Program
Minnesota Parents Know Website
School Readiness Study
Early Childhood Screening
Child Care and Adult Food Program

DHS

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)
 School Readiness Connections
Child Care Development Grants
 Child Care Resource and Referral
 Minnesota Early Childhood and School-Age Professional Development
 System
 Family Friend and Neighbor Supports
 Regional Child Care Services Grants
Parent Aware Pilot
Pre-kindergarten Allowance Exploratory Projects
Child Care Licensing
Children's Mental Health

Other state agencies offer important services that support young children and their families but remain outside the purview of this Council.

IV. Early Childhood Advisory Council

A. Creation of the Early Childhood Advisory Council

In September, 2008, Governor Tim Pawlenty signed [Executive Order 08-14](#), creating the State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care (“Early Childhood Advisory Council”). Federal law authorized creation and assigned responsibilities to the advisory council. The Minnesota State legislature enacted a law in 2008 that included legislators as members of the Council, added responsibilities and appropriated one-time funds to support the Council. The Governor’s executive order was needed to formally create the advisory council and define its administrative parameters.

B. Membership of the Early Childhood Advisory Council

The Governor’s Early Childhood Advisory Council is an advisory body that makes recommendations to the Governor and legislature. The Council is made up of 17 gubernatorial and legislative appointees. The members represent parents, legislators, researchers, higher education, Head Start, publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs, private providers of early childhood services and state agencies.

Members serve on the Council and are also encouraged to serve on one of its committees. A list of members appears in Appendix C.

C. Responsibilities of the Early Childhood Advisory Council

The Early Childhood Advisory Council has a number of responsibilities including making recommendations on how to most effectively create a high-quality early childhood system in Minnesota in order to improve the educational outcomes of children so that all children are school-ready by 2020.

The responsibilities are outlined in [Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, Public Law 110-134](#); [Minnesota Statutes 2008, Section 124D.141, Subdivision 2](#); and the [Governor’s Executive Order 08-14](#) and are reflected in the charges of the committees.

The Council is responsible for fulfilling the following duties:

1. Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment.
2. Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state funded programs.
3. Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in programs.
4. Develop recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system.
5. Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement.

6. Assess the capacity and effectiveness of 2- and 4-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state toward supporting the development of early childhood educators.
7. Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards.
8. Make recommendations on the most efficient and effective way to leverage state and federal funding streams for early childhood and child care programs.
9. Make recommendations on how to coordinate or co-locate early childhood and child care programs in one state Office of Early Learning.
10. Review program evaluations regarding high-quality early childhood programs.
11. Make recommendations to the governor and legislature, including proposed legislation on how to most effectively create a high-quality early childhood system.
12. Submit a statewide strategic report addressing the activities described to the Governor, the Legislature and the State Director of Head Start Collaboration on or before June 30, 2009.
13. Create an inventory of early childhood services ([HF 1728](#), an additional duty added by the Minnesota State Legislature in May, 2009).

D. Committees of the Early Childhood Advisory Council

The Council values the wide variety of expertise and experience of people in the early childhood field. In an effort to broaden community participation, learn from their experiences and to assist in meeting its responsibilities, the Council convenes four committees: Accountability, Access and Finance, Professional Development and Early Learning Standards. Each committee is chaired by a council member and a community member, made up of community members and charged with making recommendations to the Council on several responsibilities outlined in state and federal law. Recommendations made by committees are brought to the full Council for consideration. (See committee charges in the section below.)

V. Moving Toward Outcomes

A. Goal and Guiding Principles

Goal:

By 2020, all Minnesota children are school-ready as they enter kindergarten. The Council will provide recommendations to the Governor and Minnesota Legislature toward a vision for an integrated system for early care and education that will involve families, schools and communities to achieve this outcome.

Target Audience

Primary: Minnesota's governor and legislative bodies that set funding and policy for the state's early childhood care and education system.

Secondary:

Public Agencies

Federal agencies

State agencies

Local agencies

Stakeholders

Children

Parents and family members

Early childhood providers

Higher education

Private foundations

Business community

Guiding Principles

1. Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.
2. Early experiences affect the development of a child's brain and lay the foundation for lifelong learning and emotional well-being.
3. Responsibility for a child's success rests primarily with parents. Families have an enormous impact on a child's success. Parents and family members need information and support to create an environment that will ensure their child's achievement of full potential.
4. It is essential that children have strong, nurturing relationships with the adults in their lives so they reach their full potential.
5. Culturally appropriate services are essential to an effective early childhood care and education system.

6. Since the majority of early childhood care and education spending is directed by families, children and families are best served by a system that includes a range of education and care options that is easily understood and accessed.
7. In order to maximize children's potential, children must be ready for schools and schools must be ready for children.
8. Public funds for early childhood care and education should be prioritized to the children at-risk to support achieving their full potential.
9. Children and families are best served when research-based programs and policies that align with the 10 Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs are implemented and evaluated regularly (see below).
10. The work of the Council and its committees will rely on evidence-based research.
11. The Council acknowledges the complexity of the lives of children and families. All children and families benefit from strong and healthy systems of public and community support.

The 10 Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs

During Phase I of the 2006 Minnesota Governor's Summit on School Readiness, two early childhood research experts, Arthur Reynolds of the University of Minnesota and Susan Neuman of the University of Michigan, presented 10 essential elements of effective early childhood programs as defined by research. The researchers concurred that a significant body of evidence exists to support these findings.

Definitions

1. **Target children at-risk.** The effects of early education on school performance and social adjustment are greater for children that are at-risk of school failure than for children at low risk.
2. **Begin early.** The earlier that education intervention begins, the larger the impact and the more likely those effects will be sustained.
3. **The number of years of preschool and the length of program services** is positively associated with children's learning and development.
4. **Intensity of instruction.** The instructional content and activities should be of sufficient length and intensity to address learning needs adequately. A teacher's organization and use of time does matter.
5. **Small class sizes and low child-to-staff ratios.** Class sizes of fewer than 20 and child-to-staff ratios less than 10-to-1 are associated with greater learning gains.

These should be lower for 3-year-olds (i.e., class sizes of less than 19 and ratios less than 9-to-1).

6. **Highly trained professionals and ongoing professional development.** Children taught by teachers who are well-trained are more likely to experience high-quality programs. Teachers and staff should have regular opportunities with sufficient time allocated to participate in professional development activities to keep current on best practices in the field.
7. **Comprehensive services.** Programs that provide a full range of education and family services are more responsive to children's needs and will be more likely to impact child development outcomes. Attention to children's education and social development, family needs, health, and social services are important. Opportunities for parent involvement are especially important.
8. **Compensatory services.** Instruction that accelerates literacy and language development in an appropriate manner is a major need for many children at-risk.
9. **Coordination of transitions to kindergarten and the early grades.** The extent to which the preschool program is integrated with kindergarten and the elementary grades leads to smoother transitions to school. Attention to coordination and the provision of services across ages can help sustain the positive effects of preschool.
10. **Strong accountability system.** Programs should have well-documented learning standards. There should be formative assessments of children's progress on well-validated indicators. Careful monitoring of program quality also is important.

B. Preliminary Strategic Plan

The Council has begun conversations about priorities and steps to take to reach its goals. A preliminary strategic plan is being developed (see Appendix D). The goals and outcomes below describe the charges and provide direction for the work of the groups. It is expected that the committees will enhance the strategic plan as they immerse themselves in their tasks.

Accountability

Co-Chair: Karen Klinzing, Minnesota Department of Education (ECAC)

Co-Chair: Sandy Meyers, Resources for Child Caring

The accountability committee will make recommendations for an accountability system that facilitates positive outcomes for children birth through transition to kindergarten. Components of an accountability system include learning standards that express shared expectations for children and program standards that ensure high-quality programming. With standards in place, an accountability system depends on documentation of children's progress toward goals and measures that assess program quality. The accountability committee will make recommendations regarding systems

and processes that answer the questions: 1) Are services for children ages birth-5 of high-quality and available throughout the state, including pre-kindergarten services for low income children and children with multiple risk factors? 2) How can unified data collection be established and maintained? 3) What do program evaluations say? 4) Are mechanisms in place to systematically track and measure child outcomes?

Charges

- A. *Create an inventory of early childhood services (State Duty 4, legislation passed May 2009).*
- B. *Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment (Federal Duty I).*
- C. *Develop recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system (Federal Duty IV).*
- D. *Review program evaluations (State Duty 3).*

Access and Finance

Co-Chair: Tom Holton, Bloomington/Richfield School District (ECAC)

Co-Chair: Arthur Reynolds, University of Minnesota (ECAC)

Co-Chair: Skip Ferris, Arrowhead Head Start

The access and finance committee will look at sources of funds and funding strategies needed to support an early childhood infrastructure as well as programs and services that meet the level of intensity required by families. Programs require adequate funding to implement learning and program standards that will positively impact children's school readiness. They need to attract, train and retain adequate numbers of staff with compensation packages that are comparable to other educators. They need to afford appropriate space, equipment and instructional materials.

The access and finance group will look at issues that pose barriers within and across funding streams and will make recommendations to ease or eliminate the barriers. This group will examine private and public investments that provide sustained support for programs, families and accountability and improvement efforts. In addition, this group is charged with looking at the benefits, drawbacks and feasibility of an Office of Early Learning to ensure efficient and effective coordination of early childhood care and education programs.

Charges

- A. *Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally-funded and state-funded programs (Federal Duty II).*
- B. *Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in programs (Federal Duty III).*

C. *Make recommendations on the most efficient and effective way to leverage state and federal funding (State Duty 1).*

D. *Make recommendations on how to coordinate or co-locate early childhood and child care programs in one state Office of Early Learning (State Duty 2).*

Professional Development

Co-Chair: Joe Nathan, University of Minnesota

Co-Chair: Mary Vanderwert, Head Start Collaboration, Department of Education

Co-Chair: Angele Passe, BlueWater Associates, Inc.

The Professional Development committee is charged with making recommendations that will establish a professional development and career advancement system. A professional development system offers various supports to ensure access to high-quality early childhood training. A professional development system includes, but is not limited to: articulation of core competencies, a career lattice, a training delivery system, quality assurance of trainers and training, and credentialing requirements.

This group will look at what it takes to prepare people to enter the field of early childhood for the important work they will do. This group will analyze current preservice capacity and effectiveness and make recommendations on improving the current situation. It will also examine the training needed once a person enters the field to make certain they have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children and families. In addition, the group will consider ways to ensure there is an adequate supply of qualified early childhood personnel who are fairly compensated.

Charges

A. *Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement (Federal Duty V).*

B. *Assess the capacity and effectiveness of 2- and 4-year public and private institutions of higher education (Federal Duty VI).*

Early Learning Standards

Co-Chair: Julie Sjordahl, St. David's Child Development

Co-Chair: Molly O'Shaughnessy Montessori Training Center of Minnesota

The Early Learning Standards committee is responsible for looking at the early learning standards, program standards and a continuum of services and programs that meets the needs and provides support for parents. In conjunction with the Access and Finance committee, this group will look at increasing the overall participation of children in quality programs. Early learning standards provide a framework for understanding a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children. Program standards establish criteria for high-quality programs.

Information about how well a child, program or state are meeting standards can be used to guide planning, professional development and continuous improvement efforts. Early learning standards and program standards need to reflect current research and social context. Once they are created, they need to be reviewed periodically. Child and program standards will be most effective if developed and implemented within a context that addresses barriers to participation of children and families.

This committee will make recommendations regarding: 1) how the state can improve its early learning and program standards, 2) how participation can be increased, especially participation of underrepresented and special populations in high-quality programming and 3) the resources available and needed by parents to support them in their job as the child's first teachers.

Charges:

- A. Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in programs (Federal Duty III).*
- B. Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards (Federal Duty VII).*
- C. Make recommendations for improvements in program standards (Federal Duty VII).*

Note: See Appendix D for the full Preliminary Strategic Plan.

C. Building Community Understanding and Support

The Council is taking a number of steps to build community understanding and support of its role, responsibilities and work. All meetings held by the Council are open to the public. Public members are encouraged to attend and have the opportunity at each meeting to give public comment. Several other steps to encourage public involvement are highlighted below.

Committees of the Early Childhood Advisory Council

The four committees (Accountability, Access and Financing, Professional Development and Early Learning Standards) identified by the Council will be used to help achieve its goals. The committees will be made up of council members and community members. A broad call for applications to serve on committees went out via email. Approximately 150 responses were received. Efforts were made to select committee members who have expertise and experience in the early childhood care and education and systems building. Members were also selected to represent a variety of programs, various parts of the state, and differing cultural groups. Bringing these groups together will help the Council hear from different stakeholders as well as build support in various communities.

E Forum

The Council is interested in keeping early childhood stakeholders informed and listening to their feedback. To this end, an interactive Web-based E-forum has been created so people throughout the state of Minnesota can comment on the suggested strategies developed by the Council. Public comments will be used to refine suggested strategies of the committees.

Town Hall Meetings

Plans are underway to hold town hall meetings in various parts of Minnesota and with special interest groups. Strategies for achieving desired outcomes will be discussed. Comments made will help refine the work of the Council.

Thought Leaders

The Council is interested in learning from those who are thought leaders. It is also committed to discussing its recommendations with those who share responsibility in meeting the needs of young children and their families. Several people have presented information to the Council to date including: Duane Benson, Minnesota Early Learning Foundation; Art Rolnick, Federal Reserve Bank of Minnesota; Missy Thompson, Greater Twin Cities United Way; and Richard Chase, Wilder Research.

Appendix A. Council History/Accomplishments

Fall 2008

Governor Signs Executive Order

Governor Tim Pawlenty signs the Executive Order creating the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). Federal law authorizes creation and assigns responsibilities to the advisory council. The 2008 legislature enacted a law to include legislators as members of the Council, adding responsibilities and appropriating funds to support the Council. The Governor's executive order is needed to formally create the advisory council and define the administrative parameters for the Council.

Fall 2008

Applications for ECAC are accepted by the Secretary of State

Over 80 applications are submitted from experts and stakeholders throughout the state of Minnesota.

Winter 2008

Governor Appoints ECAC Members

Governor Tim Pawlenty announces the appointment of ten council members and Council Chair. In addition to appointed members, federal law requires designees from the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Department of Human Services and the State Director of Head Start Collaboration. Appointed legislators also serve on the Council.

Winter 2009

ECAC is Convened

ECAC's Chair convenes the first meeting. Responsibilities of the Council are shared and an update of work underway in Minnesota is presented.

Winter 2009

Committee Structure is Approved

Council members approve the use of committees to research and make recommendations to the full council. Committees will be made up of council members and community members. Community members will offer expertise and experience. Four committees are identified:

- Accountability
- Access and Finance
- Professional Development
- Early Learning Standards

Winter 2009 Bylaws are adopted

Winter 2009 ECAC Webpage is Created

A Website is established where meeting minutes and pertinent materials are posted to inform the public of ECAC activities.

Winter 2009 Ad Hoc Committee to Explore Opportunities within America’s Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

The committee examines the ARRA for opportunities for funding ECAC activities. Reports are presented at council meetings to keep council members up-to-date.

Winter 2009 Call for Committee Applications

A broad call for applications to serve on committees is sent out via email. Approximately 150 responses are received. Committee members are selected. Work begins Summer 2009.

Summer 2009 Goal and Guiding Principles are Adopted

Summer 2009 Interactive Web-based Forum is Created

An interactive Web-based forum is created to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the materials and recommendations developed by the Council. It is moderated by Minnesota Department of Education staff.

Summer 2009 ECACs Preliminary Strategic Plan is drafted and endorsed as a working document (see Appendix D)

Appendix B. Executive Summary of Priorities

The following summarizes discussions of the Early Childhood Advisory Council regarding priorities for their work. It informs the strategic plan (see Appendix D) and provides direction for committees of the Council.

1. Children

- Focus on children birth through transition to kindergarten.
- Work first, to improve outcomes for children who are in families with low incomes and/or children who experience multiple risk factors including but not limited to:
 - Parents with high school diploma or less.
 - Primary home language other than English.
 - Special needs.
 - Status in the child protective services system.
 - Homelessness.
 - Child and/or parent mental health issues.
 - Parental substance abuse.
- Work to improve outcomes for children at-risk which will improve outcomes for all children.
- Work to promote development of skills of the whole child, including:
 - Physical development.
 - The arts.
 - Social and emotional development.
 - Language and literacy.
 - Mathematical thinking.
- Target services to children who are at-risk, as well as to their families and offer some services to all children.

2. Programs and Services

- Ensure a continuum of services. Focus first on programs for children that are supported by public funding (further steps yet to be defined). All programs and services must have the following components:
 - Parent education.
 - High quality.
 - Financial support.
- Begin work by increasing opportunities for children who are at-risk to participate in high-quality programs.
- Use program standards for continuous improvement efforts. Program standards must to allow for wide ranges of learning and care options for full spectrum of families.
- Explore holding all settings to the same program standards or customizing program standards for different settings.

- Work to increase support for low income families to afford high-quality care and education.
- Increase funding to programs in general. Then strengthen funding that is direct to programs and portable for families.
- Explore braiding and blending of funding across levels (federal, state, local and portable). Determine what is working well and the pros and cons of each.

3. System Supports

- Start work with a focus on support for continued training and education for early childhood personnel.
- Ensure culturally responsive programs including increasing outreach efforts to parents and addressing transportation issues.
- Tie accountability to the 10 Essential Elements of Effective Care and Education Programs (see above). Find feasible ways to take successful pilots to scale. Successful pilots should include the 10 Essential Elements of Effective Care and Education Programs but may look different.

Appendix C. Early Childhood Advisory Council Membership

Sarah Caruso
Chair and Parent

Andy Chen
Parent

Stephanie Corradi
Parent

Tarryl Clark
Minnesota Senate

Randy Demmer
Minnesota House of Representatives

Tom Holton
Public Member

Chuck Johnson
Minnesota Department of Human
Services

Karen Klinzing
Minnesota Department of Education

Julie Leslie
Parent

Geoff Michel
Minnesota Senate

Joe Nathan
Public Member

Arthur Reynolds
Higher Education

Maureen Seiwert
Local Provider of Early Childhood
Education Services

Sandy Simar
Local Head Start Agency

Julie Sjordal
Local Provider of Early Childhood
Education Services

Nora Slawik
Minnesota House of Representatives

Mary Vanderwert
State Head Start Collaboration Director

Appendix D. Preliminary Strategic Plan – June 2009

I. Introduction

The goal of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) is to ensure that by 2020, all Minnesota children are school-ready as they enter kindergarten. This council provides recommendations to the Governor and Minnesota Legislature toward a vision for an integrated system for early childhood care and education that will achieve this outcome. The Council has developed a set of Guiding Principles based on research and best practice for children, families and systems. Because resources are limited, the work of the Council will be directed first to children who are at-risk and high-quality care paramount for all children.

Specific responsibilities of the ECAC outlined in state and federal law have been divided into four groups: Accountability, Access and Finance, Professional Development and Early Learning Standards. The Council has decided to convene committees around these themes. The committees will be made up of council and community members. They are charged with making recommendations to the Council.

The goals, outcomes and suggested committee work below describe the charges and provide preliminary direction for the committees. This draft of the strategic plan is expected to help the Council begin to realize its goal as stated in the guiding principles. The suggested committee work that is proposed will help achieve the priorities set forth by the Council. It is expected that the committees will enhance the strategic plan as they immerse themselves in their tasks.

Definitions:

At-risk: children who are in families with low incomes and or/children who experience multiple risk factors placing them “at-risk for academic failure.”

Culturally appropriate services: services that are respectful of and responsive to cultural and linguistic needs.

Evidence-based research: empirical investigations and syntheses that are rigorous in design and methods, use reliable and valid measurement procedures, have undergone peer-review, and that thoroughly document and interpret findings for maximum reproducibility.

Low income: family income is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

Transition to kindergarten: begins several months prior to kindergarten entrance and continues for several months following enrollment.

School-ready: the skills, knowledge, behaviors and accomplishments that children know and can do as they enter kindergarten in the areas of social and emotional development, language development, cognition and physical development.

Suggested Committee Work for all duties:

- **Utilize early childhood research as a rationale for recommendations.**
- **Analyze recommendations made for ECAC priorities, feasibility and impact.**
- **Work with other committees to ensure coordination of efforts.**
- **Identify what policy items can be addressed for no-cost or low cost or identify a source of funding.**
- **Ensure systems build on current work and do not duplicate efforts.**

II. Accountability

The accountability committee will make recommendations for an accountability system that facilitates positive outcomes for children birth through transition to kindergarten. Components of an accountability system include learning standards that express shared expectations for children and program standards that ensure high-quality programming. With standards in place, an accountability system depends on documentation of children's progress toward goals and measures that assess program quality. The accountability committee will make recommendations regarding systems and processes that answer the questions: 1) Are services for children ages birth-5 of high-quality and available throughout the state, including pre-kindergarten services for low income children and children with multiple risk factors? 2) How can unified data collection be established and maintained? 3) What do program evaluations say? 4) Are mechanisms in place to systematically track and measure child outcomes?

A. Create an inventory of early childhood services (State Duty 4, legislation passed May 2009).

Outcome: Council recommendations will be made based on current information.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Define a range of services to be included.
- Identify existing resources on which to build an inventory. Utilize:
 - Program descriptions.
 - Budget pages.
 - Program reports.
 - Evaluations.
- Identify gaps in information.
- Seek additional information when it is available.

B. Conduct a periodic statewide needs assessment (Federal Duty I).

Outcome: Council recommendations will be made based on current information and current research regarding the status of early childhood care and education in Minnesota.

Outcome: Early childhood stakeholders and policy makers have reliable information on which to base policy and program improvement decisions.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Review current research regarding the needs of children and families and the most effective strategies for meeting the needs.
- Identify existing state and national needs assessments that are currently being done.
- Identify information gaps where need outweighs the efforts of the needs assessment.
- Identify sources of information.
- Analyze the data.
- Report findings to the Council to inform the work of the Council and other committees.
- Make recommendations regarding a system for conducting future periodic statewide needs assessments to ensure valid and reliable information is available on which to base policy and program improvement decisions.
- Define questions for needs assessment and a schedule to identify emerging questions where results will be available to inform necessary decisions.
- Identify sources of information.
- Identify method of collection.
- Create guidelines for gathering information on programs, children and systems.
- Develop guidelines for using information from needs assessment.
- Identify cost of start up and implementation.
- Identify timeline for implementation.

D. Develop recommendations regarding the establishment of a unified data collection system (Federal Duty IV).

Outcome: Valid, relevant data is available and used in program planning, evaluation and policy development.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Tie accountability to the 10 Essential Elements of Effective Early Care and Education Programs, child early learning standards and program standards (see Section V).
- Identify the purposes and uses of data (local or state) that will be collected.
- Once the purposes are identified, fully define functionality and anticipated timeline/schedule for development, implementation and refinement.

- Identify existing data collection systems that could be linked or contribute to a unified data collection system.
- Identify data elements needed.
- Explore capacity to share data across programs and service systems.
- Explore other state systems.
- Create guidelines for developing baseline information on programs, children and early childhood care and education delivery systems.
- Develop guidelines for using data for continuous improvement.
- Link early childhood data system to the k-12 data system.
- Monitor and ensure compliance with issues related to data privacy at the national and state level as well as at the system and use level. Build opportunities for data sharing where possible.
- Identify cost of start up and implementation plan.
- Further study the needs regarding the shortened School Readiness Checklist for Minnesota School Readiness Study.
- Coordinate with Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant planning group working on developing an application for a grant opportunity for early childhood at US DOE.

D. Review program evaluations (State Duty 3).

Outcome: Policies and planning that address programs and services are based on current information.

Outcome: Evaluations of pilot programs will be assessed to determine which are effective and may be feasible to replicate or take to scale.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Identify applicable program evaluations that are available, analyze program evaluation for usefulness in discerning program effectiveness and identify gaps in program evaluations.
- Report findings to the Council to inform the work of the Council and other committees.
- Identify future possible evaluation designs with realistic parameters, based on available resources.

III. Access and Finance

The access and finance committee will look at sources of funds and funding strategies needed to support an early childhood infrastructure as well as programs and services that meet the level of intensity required by families. Programs require adequate funding to implement learning and program standards that will positively impact children's school readiness. They need to attract, train and retain adequate numbers of staff with compensation packages that are comparable to other educators. They need to afford appropriate space, equipment and instructional materials.

The access and finance group will look at issues that pose barriers within and across funding streams and will make recommendations to ease or eliminate the barriers. This group will examine private and public investments that provide sustained support for programs, families and accountability and improvement efforts. In addition, this group is charged with looking at the benefits, drawbacks and feasibility of an Office of Early Learning to ensure efficient and effective coordination of early childhood care and education and child care programs.

A. Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded programs (Federal Duty II).

Outcome: Programs and communities will have greater flexibility in designing and implementing services that meet the needs of their families while meeting the state standards for high-quality.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Identify barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally, state and locally funded programs and make recommendations on policy changes to improve collaboration and coordination.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and coordination among federally and state funded programs.
- Identify successful programs that may be feasible to replicate or take to scale.
- Identify steps toward coordination of funds that pilots have been able to take under current law and barriers that persist.

B. Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in programs (Federal Duty III).

Outcome: Additional children who are low-income will attend high-quality programs.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Identify gaps in service delivery/unmet needs, especially for children who are at-risk.
- Identify barriers to participation including issues of affordability beginning with support for families with low incomes or multiple risk factors.
- Identify strategies for addressing affordability issues.
- Identify cost estimates and methods for funding increased participation in early childhood programs.
- Create a method of periodically assessing affordability issues.

C. Make recommendations on the most efficient and effective way to leverage state and federal funding (State Duty 1).

Outcome: Existing funds are maximized.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Inventory public and private funding sources using existing analysis as starting point.
- Identify gaps in funding for infrastructure, programs and services.
- Examine ways to strengthen funding that combines direct funding to programs and portable funding to families.
- Examine methods for blending and/or braiding funding streams
- Explore additional funding mechanisms.
- Assess possibilities for redirecting existing funds to more strongly support optimal child development.
- Make recommendations on ways to align resources with continuum of services with initial focus on children who are at-risk.
- Develop costs estimates of various models (including infrastructure costs), identify cost drivers, and assess level of service.
- Provide cost estimates of improving children's development including school readiness by filling identified gaps in the service continuum.

D. Make recommendations on how to coordinate or co-locate early childhood and child care programs in one state Office of Early Learning (State Duty 2).

Outcome: Early childhood programs and services will be administered in a way that is accessible to families and supports children's optimal development.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Define possible models for an Office of Early Learning.
- Determine the benefits, drawbacks, cost-effectiveness and feasibility of each model.

IV. Professional Development

The Professional Development committee is charged with making recommendations that will establish a professional development and career advancement system. A professional development system offers various supports to ensure access to high-quality early childhood training. A professional development system includes, but is not limited to: articulation of core competencies, a career lattice, a training delivery system, quality assurance of trainers and training, and credentialing requirements.

This group will look at what it takes to prepare people to enter the field of early childhood for the important work they will do. This group will analyze current preservice capacity and effectiveness and make recommendations on improving the current situation. It will also examine the training needed once a person enters the field to make certain they have the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children and families. In addition, the group will consider ways to ensure there is an adequate supply of qualified early childhood personnel who are fairly compensated.

A. Develop recommendations regarding statewide professional development and career advancement (Federal Duty V).

Outcome: High-quality continuing education is accessible and affordable for early childhood personnel.

Outcome: Early childhood personnel in Minnesota have the necessary skills and knowledge and are fairly compensated and there is an adequate supply of qualified early childhood personnel that meets the needs of children and families.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Integrate into the work of the ECAC appropriate recommendations of the Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC) and other statewide initiatives charged with creating or implementing professional development systems.
- Ensure core competencies are based on the research-based skills needed for high-quality care and education of children birth through transition to kindergarten and are readily accessible.
- Develop training opportunities and training delivery methods appropriate for all early childhood personnel including family, friend and neighbor caregivers.
- Develop and implement on-going mentoring/coaching that enhances the understanding and implementation of assessment for individualized instruction.
- Develop strategies to retain the highest performing early childhood personnel, which may include incentive programs and improved compensation.

B. Assess the capacity and effectiveness of 2- and 4-year public and private institutions of higher education (Federal Duty VI).

Outcome: Early childhood personnel are well-prepared to meet the needs of young children and support families.

Outcome: There will be an adequate supply of early childhood personnel.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Assess the capacity of Institutions of Higher Education to fully prepare early childhood personnel for the field focusing on best practice based on current research and including intentional teacher-child interactions, working with special populations and children demonstrating behavior challenges.
- Develop strategies for increasing the number of well-prepared people entering the early childhood field.

- Develop strategies for increasing the diversity of early childhood personnel: bilingual and home language speakers, staff from communities of color and immigrant communities, etc.
- Identify if 2- and 4 year programs provide adequate number of student slots within a reasonable travel range.
- Determine if 2- and 4- year programs offer courses that meet the needs of non-traditional as well as traditional students.
- Determine the affordability of 2- and 4- year early childhood preparation programs and methods to make programs more affordable to students with a financial need.
- Assess the opportunities for articulation throughout the entire higher education system and make recommendations.
- Assess barriers to effectiveness of student teaching especially while needing to be employed and make recommendations.

V. Early Learning Standards

The Early Learning Standards committee is responsible for looking at the early learning standards, program standards and a continuum of services and programs that meets the needs and provides support for parents. In conjunction with the Access and Finance Committee, this group committee, will look at increasing the overall participation of children in quality programs. Early learning standards provide a framework for understanding a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children. Program standards establish criteria for high-quality programs.

Information about how well a child, program or state are meeting standards can be used to guide planning, professional development and continuous improvement efforts. Early learning standards and program standards need to reflect current research and social context. Once they are created, they need to be reviewed periodically. Child and program standards will be most effective if developed and implemented within a context that addresses barriers to participation of children and families.

This committee will make recommendations regarding: 1) how the state can improve its early learning and program standards, 2) how participation can be increased, especially participation of underrepresented and special populations in high-quality programming and 3) the resources available and needed by parents to support them in their job as the child's first teacher.

A. Develop recommendations for increasing the overall participation of children in programs (Federal Duty III).

Outcome: Parents have access to information and resources that support their participation in their child's education.

Outcome: Children will participate in high-quality early childhood programs as directed by family needs and risk factors.

Outcome: Children and families from underrepresented populations will have their needs met in early childhood care and education settings and will be well prepared for school.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Identify gaps in service delivery/unmet needs, especially for children from underrepresented populations.
- Inventory current services for parent involvement and develop a continuum of parent involvement strategies.
- Promote learning opportunities that enhance parents' competence as their child's first teacher.
- Consider developing a parent version of the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress (ECIPs) and developing information for parents on understanding child assessments and how to use information to support their child's development.
- Identify barriers to participation including issues of access beginning with support for families with low incomes or multiple risk factors or from communities of color.
- Identify strategies for addressing access issues including:
 - Ways to increase participation for children and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and children who have special needs.
 - Transportation issues.
 - Identification and referral of children and families with multiple needs.
- Create a method of periodically assessing access and availability issues.

B. Make recommendations for improvements in state early learning standards (Federal Duty VII).

Outcome: Early learning standards for children ages birth to 5 are aligned with K-12 Standards.

Outcome: Information regarding using the early learning standards with children with special learning needs and from diverse cultural and linguistic communities are included.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Consider guidance to the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress that will support the work of early childhood personnel and Family Friends and Neighbors (FFN) working with children:
 - Coming from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
 - Who have special needs including behavioral challenges.
- Design creative training opportunities that teaches early childhood personnel and FFN to use the guidance.

- Develop a curriculum framework based on standards that include goals, content, pedagogy and instructional practices and aligns with program standards.
- Recommend practices based on standards that promote individualized and adaptive practices for each child, support for families and shared responsibilities between families and early childhood personnel.
- Promote successful strategies based on standards alignment for transition to kindergarten.

C. Make recommendations for improvements in program standards (Federal Duty VII).

Outcome: Realistic goals for program quality are articulated and used for continuous improvement.

Suggested Committee Work:

- Define program standards for all programs.
- Ensure program standards allow for a wide range of early learning and care settings.
- Recommend whether all programs are held to the same standards or customize standards for different settings.
- Ensure programs are culturally responsive and inclusive.
- Create program standards that ensure learning environments offer options for meeting each child's individual needs and support parent involvement.
- Build on recommendations developed for the Quality Rating and Improvement System framework due from MDE and DHS to the state legislature March, 2011.
- Create quality improvement options for increasing quality, targeting limited resources to areas of quality that have strong correlation to child outcomes as well as to programs serving a higher concentration of children who are at-risk.
- Recommend training and technical assistance that ensure services meet and/or exceed program standards.
- Develop and define systems for monitoring, articulating trade-offs that may be needed between program standards, monitoring and/or quality improvement supports.
- Develop a system to periodically assess and make improvements in program standards that reflect current research and best practices.

Appendix E. Resources

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). *A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: using evidence to improve outcomes in learning, behavior, and health for vulnerable children*. Retrieved 2008, from http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/content/downloads/Policy_Framework.pdf

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The Pew Charitable Trusts, the Foundation for Child Development and the Joyce Foundation (2007). *Taking Stock: assessing and improving early childhood learning and program quality*. Retrieved 2009, from http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/PK3/resources/pdf/Accountability_Task_Force_Final_Report1.pdf