

# INTERIM REPORT OF THE KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITION TASK FORCE

## CREATING AN EFFICIENT SYSTEM FOR KANSAS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

On January 10, 2023, Governor Laura Kelly signed [Executive Order 23-01](#), creating the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force and tasking the group with creation of 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.” A final report from the Task Force, due to the Governor on January 1, 2024, will include recommendations and draft legislation designed to create an early childhood cabinet agency for the state.

This interim report provides essential background, summarizes the Task Force’s work to date, and lays out the next steps for the committee’s work.



Governor Laura Kelly outlines charges to the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force, alongside co-chairs Cornelia Stevens and Sam Huenergardt, during the group’s first meeting on March 31, 2023.

### BACKGROUND

State governments are responsible for a wide variety of programs supporting young children and their families – many of them federally funded. Thanks, in part, to the traditional disbursement of health, education, and human service dollars from federal agencies to their state-level counterparts, it is not uncommon for states to see programs for young children spread across multiple departments.

While this methodology may seem reasonable from a fiscal perspective, the resulting state systems are often fragmented and siloed, resulting in duplication of effort and failure to sufficiently coordinate and optimize taxpayer resources. Perhaps most concerningly, these systems can result in indecipherable mazes for families, challenging them to navigate multiple layers of bureaucracy to access time-sensitive services during their children’s most formative years of development.

For this reason, many states – Kansas included - have begun to reexamine the governance of their early childhood programs, seeking to reduce the number of agencies in which they are housed, or - in a growing number of cases - creating consolidated early childhood cabinet agencies charged with the administration of all such programs.

States have approached this task in a number of different ways, with many having already undertaken this work years – or even decades - ago. Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning, for example, was established under Governor Sonny Perdue (R) in 2004. Alabama’s Department of Early Childhood Education followed in 2005 under the leadership of Governor Bob Riley (R), while Arkansas created its Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (housed within the state’s Department of Human Services) during the administration of Governor Asa Hutchinson (R) in 2017.

This trend toward consolidation has only accelerated in recent years. In 2019, New Mexico lawmakers passed [legislation](#) creating the state’s new Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD), a stand-alone cabinet

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agency under the supervision of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D), housing all of the state’s major early childhood programs. Similar legislation in [Colorado](#) and [Oregon](#) has recently enabled the creation of new early childhood departments. In neighboring Missouri, Governor Mike Parson (R) issued an [executive order](#) in January of 2021 consolidating the state’s major early childhood programs into a new division of the state’s existing Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, known as the [Office of Childhood](#).

Other states are taking more incremental approaches, moving individual programs into agencies better equipped to coordinate their administration with other offerings.

In early 2023, the Bipartisan Policy Center [issued a report](#) on the relative efficiency and coordination of state early childhood systems, [ranking Kansas 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation](#). The state’s weak showing is a reflection of its existing structure, in which programs for young children are housed across four major units of government, housed within three separate state agencies: the [Kansas State Department of Education](#) (which also serves as the administrative home of the [Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund](#)), the [Kansas Department for Children and Families](#), and the [Kansas Department of Health and Environment](#).

## TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP (as of July 1, 2023)

Barry Downing, Wichita—Honorary Chair

Cornelia Stevens, Wichita—Co-Chair

Sam Huenergardt, Shawnee—Co-Chair

Secretary Laura Howard, Topeka

Secretary Janet Stanek, Topeka

Melissa Rooker, Fairway

Amanda Petersen, Lawrence

Sara Bloom, Hays

Lona Duvall, Garden City

Kelly Davydov, Overland Park

Betsy Wearing, Salina

Jennifer Adhima, Lawrence

David Jordan, Hutchinson

Monica Murnan, Pittsburg

Senator Pat Pettey, Kansas City

Senator Brenda Dietrich, Topeka

Representative Susan Ruiz, Shawnee

Representative Troy Waymaster, Bunker Hill

Executive Order 23-01 advances Kansas to the forefront of this national conversation, seeking to reform and streamline the state’s existing structure in favor of a single agency approach.

## PROCESS AND WORK TO DATE

On February 21, 2023, Governor Kelly [announced](#) both the appointed membership of the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force (text box at left indicates Task Force membership at time of announcement and issuance of this interim report) and plans for the group to receive staffing support from [The Hunt Institute](#), a North Carolina-based education policy support founded in 2001 by four-term NC Governor Jim Hunt.

As of this writing, the group has held two in-person meetings at the Kansas State Capitol and a nine-city stakeholder feedback tour during the final week of June 2023.

## MEETING ONE: THE KANSAS EARLY CHILDHOOD LANDSCAPE (March 31, 2023)

Executive Order 23-01 not only established the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force, but detailed the broad parameters of its work, beginning with a requirement that the Task Force conduct *“an analysis of the current early childhood service delivery system in Kansas and how it is financed – with a specific focused on gaps, inefficiencies, and redundancies.”*

In an effort to jumpstart this complex process, The Hunt Institute worked alongside staff from the administration, the four major child serving entities and Task Force co-chairs Cornelia Stevens

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and Sam Huenergardt to develop a written process for inventorying the state’s early childhood program offerings. A template was subsequently provided to the agencies, asking them to inventory (in advance of the Task Force’s first meeting on March 31, 2023) the programs under their purviews, to include a brief description of each, alongside data on their funding and funding type, number of clients served, current levels of staffing, enabling authority, and potential gaps, inefficiencies, and opportunities for reform.

The result was [an 81-page written inventory](#) detailing 50 distinct early childhood program offerings spread across these four major units of government. This document was distributed to Task Force members in advance of Meeting 1 and was the primary focus of the group’s first meeting. While a more detailed description of these programs can be found in the written inventory, state agencies highlighted the following programs as requiring significant coordination and collaboration across agency or as a possible duplication of services:

STATE ENTITY	HIGHLIGHTED PROGRAMS
Kansas State Department of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Kansas Parent as Teachers</li> <li>● Preschool-Aged At-Risk</li> <li>● Kansas Preschool Pilot</li> <li>● Interagency Coordinating Councils</li> <li>● Child and Adult Care Food Program</li> </ul>
Kansas Children’s Cabinet & Trust Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CIF Grants (Early Childhood Block Grants)</li> <li>● Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention</li> <li>● Preschool Development Grants</li> <li>● Workforce Registry</li> </ul>
Kansas Department for Children and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Childcare Assistance</li> <li>● Childcare Quality</li> <li>● Head Start Collaboration Office and Early Head Start</li> <li>● Various home visiting programs</li> </ul>
Kansas Department for Health and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Childcare Licensing</li> <li>● Early Childhood Developmental Services</li> <li>● Newborn Screening Program</li> <li>● Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC)</li> <li>● Title V Services</li> <li>● Various home visiting programs</li> </ul>

Following an opening charge to the group from Governor Kelly and process overview from The Hunt Institute, 30 minutes apiece were allocated to the Kansas State Department of Education, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, the Kansas Department for Children and Families, and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to provide an overview of their agency offerings, reflections on the prospect of a streamlined governance structure and opportunities for reform.

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Through their presentations, each entity identified the following challenges, inefficiencies, and gaps in the current system:

STATE ENTITY	CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED
<p><b>Kansas State Department of Education</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to improve coordination and delivery of home visiting/parent education services across models.</li> <li>• Streamline funding mechanisms, especially for programs that receive funds from multiple sources.</li> <li>• Required coordination between school district, state agencies, and other service providers to deliver childcare, preschool, and Head Start services.</li> <li>• Coordination between state agencies required to provide and fund services, especially for federally funded programs and programs that serve overlapping populations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kansas Children’s Cabinet &amp; Trust Fund</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for a single steward of the early childhood system.</li> <li>• No formal decision-making authority across all-state agencies.</li> <li>• Need to align and direct funding and programmatic investments to address full needs of the mixed delivery system.</li> <li>• Lack of contractual alignment for professional development, technical assistance, and evaluation that is baked into procurement processes.</li> <li>• Need to improve coordination and navigation between state/local needs and federal guidelines.</li> <li>• Need to bolster supports for all early childhood workers across the mixed delivery system.</li> <li>• Need to modernize state data infrastructure and rapid response to integrated data requests.</li> <li>• Need for a modernized and consolidated data system that eases community and program reporting burdens and equips decision-makers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kansas Department for Children and Families</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of single access point for families seeking care.</li> <li>• Lack of streamlined access and support for childcare providers</li> <li>• Lack of common referral structure.</li> <li>• Inconsistent state-level marketing and public outreach.</li> <li>• Need to build capacity for universal home visiting.</li> <li>• Need to advance common goals and best practices for age exclusive sets of 0-3 and 0-5 by blending and leveraging these age groups.</li> <li>• Optimizing funding streams towards common goals.</li> <li>• Need to better leverage federal CCDF funds.</li> <li>• Need for streamlined administrative and reporting procedures.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for unified planning across state agencies and with external stakeholders and service providers.</li> <li>• Building capacity for early childhood workforce pipeline and additional workforce support.</li> <li>• Strengthening relationships between the state and business community to meet the state workforce needs by addressing childcare gaps.</li> </ul>
<p>Kansas Department for Health and Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for streamlined funding processes to better address the challenges of funding individual programs from multiple sources.</li> <li>• Public confusion over which state agencies lead on specific programs or services.</li> <li>• Inadequate and outdated information technology and data systems.</li> <li>• Complicated process of regulating facilities on state and local level with multiple governmental entities involved in ensuring compliance.</li> </ul>

While these level-setting presentations to the Task Force left limited time for group discussion, the group’s closing conversation (and written inventory) highlighted the immense complexity of the state’s existing system and uplifted at least one practical example of systemic inefficiency – home visiting programs – in which each of the four departments appear to have some active connection as either a funder or direct service provider, resulting in what one Task Force member noted are complex and duplicative reporting requirements for programs being supported by multiple public revenue sources.

## MEETING TWO: LESSONS FROM OTHER STATES (May 16, 2023)

In addition to requiring the Task Force to assess the state’s existing early childhood landscape, Executive Order 23-01 directs the group to consider lessons learned from other states that have already taken steps to consolidate early childhood system governance under a single agency approach like that being contemplated by Kansas. This was the focus of the group’s second in-person meeting, held May 16, 2023. After receiving a brief opening presentation by former National Teacher of the Year, Kansas’ Tabatha Rosproy (who holds the distinction of being the first and only prekindergarten teacher to be honored with this title), the group received presentations from a pair of sister states, Missouri (Dr. Pam Thomas, Assistant Commissioner, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) and Colorado (Dr. Lisa Roy, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood and Michael Cooke, Early Childhood Transition Director), both of which have recently launched consolidated structures.

In advance of the meeting, Task Force members received a [side-by-side comparison](#) detailing the different approaches taken by the two states. An abridged summary of that side-by-side comparison, including Kansas’ system, is included here:

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	MISSOURI OFFICE OF CHILDHOOD	COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD	KANSAS COORDINATED EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM
Method of Creation	<a href="#">Executive Order 21-02</a>	<a href="#">HB 21-1304 (Legislation)</a>	Executive Reorganization Orders, Constitutional Amendments, and Legislation
Organizational Structure	Consolidation into an existing state agency:  <a href="#">Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education</a>	Creation of a new cabinet agency:  <a href="#">Colorado Department of Early Childhood</a>	Coordinated system between Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, Kansas Department for Children and Families, and Kansas Department of Health and Environment
Leadership	Assistant Commissioner	Executive Director	Commissioner of Education, Children’s Cabinet members and Executive Director, and Cabinet Secretaries
Governance	Assistant Commissioner reports to the Commissioner of Education (appointed by the Governor) and the State Board of Education (appointed by the Governor and confirmed by Senate)	Executive Director is a cabinet-level position appointed by and reporting to the Governor	Commissioner of Education is appointed by the State Board of Education (who are popularly elected); Executive Director is hired as a state employee, Cabinet Secretaries are appointed by the Governor, confirmed by the Senate, and serve at the Governor’s pleasure
Creation Timeline	Executive Order 21-02 was issued on January 28, 2021, establishing the Office of Childhood with an effective/operational date of August 28, 2021 (7 month ramp up period).  Office integration efforts began April 1, 2021. This integration was completed on August 13, 2021.	HB 21-1304 was signed into law by Governor Jared Polis on June 23, 2021. The law established an effective/operational date of July 1, 2022 (1 year ramp up period).  A subsequent bill, HB 22-1197 advanced the agency’s start date to March 1, 2022, to allow for the hiring of key staff in advance of the July 1 “go-live” date.  An interagency agreement with the CO Department of Human Services covers several administrative processes including payroll and invoicing, that weren’t ready to transition when CDEC launched. This	Article 6 of the Kansas Constitution establishes the role of the Kansas State Board of Education. A State Department of Education was first created in 1915. The Kansas legislature authorized school districts to administer preschool programs in 1965 and parent education programs in 1990.  The Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund was first created in 1980, dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect. In 1999, the Kansas legislature established the Cabinet by statute to oversee expenditures from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement.  The Kansas Department for Children and Families was first

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		<p>agreement will end on September 30, 2023.</p>	<p>established within the former Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services in 1973. Following restructuring the current Department for Children and Families was established in 2012. Since its inception, the Department has had oversight of childhood initiatives, public assistance programs, and child welfare.</p> <p>The Kansas Department of Health and Environment was created in 1974, charged with protecting the health “of all Kansans.” The agency oversees childcare licensing, which was first authorized by the Kansas legislature in 1919. The licensing program at KDHE was strengthened in 2010 with the passage of “Lexie’s Law.”</p>
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Among the key lessons spotlighted by invited resource experts were:

- Timeline and Transition Staffing:** Consolidating governmental services is a complex and labor-intensive process that requires a carefully planned transition. It involves not only the thoughtful integration of programs, but consideration of how and where program data is collected and stored, how these programs are made accessible to the public, and the blending of multiple agency cultures – even as the programs being transitioned must remain functional and accessible throughout the transition period.

Logistically, the consolidation of staff into a single agency presents challenges related to payroll and human resources, information technology, the co-location of staff, and more. While none of these challenges is insurmountable, the identification of a reasonable transition timeline and dedicated staff charged with overseeing the transition is critical. In Colorado, an early childhood transition director was hired (on a time-limited basis) within the governor’s office and charged with overseeing the process, before handing off to the functional agency’s new executive director. In Missouri, an existing leader within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education was tapped both to oversee the transition and lead the new division.

Some states planning single agency consolidation processes (Oregon) have sought legislative approval to extend the initial timeline. Participants emphasized that it is more important that services and payments flow seamlessly to families and providers than it is to meet an arbitrary transition deadline.

- Transparently engage key stakeholders in the process:** Because the primary rationale for consolidation is often an improved experience for children, families, and providers, it is important to use the transition planning process to hear directly from key stakeholders about their past/current experiences within the system and how a consolidated structure might lend itself to greater efficiency. In Missouri, the Parson

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administration arranged for both a stakeholder advisory committee and focus groups – both facilitated by The Hunt Institute – to gather these insights and plan for the Office of Childhood’s ongoing engagement with key audiences.

- **Take time to involve all consolidated programs in the change management process:** Ultimately the proposed process will entail a complex business merger. In addition to gathering external stakeholder feedback, the thoughtful inclusion of transferring program staff is critical to a successful transition.

Transitions of this sort, while highly beneficial, naturally create a level of unease and anxiety among staff who may find themselves not only within a new agency, but with differing levels of authority, new supervisors, and expectations to reconsider and change what may be longstanding program policies in which they may have personal investment/pride in authorship. Successfully launching a consolidated agency will require not only time, but the identification of dynamic and skillful leaders, sensitive to the fact that their first measure of success will be blending multiple agency cultures into a seamless, unified system in which *all* decisions must support the needs of Kansas children and families.

- **Ensuring adequate budgeting for needed staff positions:** In theory, the creation of a new organizational structure to house existing government programs should not entail extensive new cost, as the resources used to support these programs already exist and should transfer with them. In practice, however, it can be difficult to disentangle and reallocate all resources used to support these programs within their current administrative homes. While program staff are easily identified for transfer, it is important to also consider all of the administrative and infrastructure supports that enable these programs - which range from human resources and IT, to payroll, accounts payable/receivable and more. A well-considered transition plan will ensure the transfer of both the programmatic and administrative resources necessary to ensure success of the new agency, while likewise considering the remaining needs of the agencies from which these programs will be transferred. And though a carefully crafted plan should minimize new costs, startup agencies routinely require some level of new/additional funding to ensure full staffing and a successful launch.
- **Ensure intentional and consistent communication, both internally and externally:** Whether with internal or external stakeholders, intentional and consistent communication is key to building trust and should be prioritized throughout the transition process (and beyond).
- **Data systems are critical:** Among the most challenging aspects of program integration is the alignment of data collection systems. Due, in part, to the wide array of local, state, and federal revenue streams supporting the nation’s early childhood programs, many utilize siloed data collection systems, incapable of connecting with one another. Investment in a unified data collection system to house all new agency data is well-advised but can be both costly and time-consuming. This is an issue to begin exploring sooner, rather than later as the state considers reform.
- **Carefully analyze federal requirements and funding streams:** One factor that often prevents meaningful systems reform is a general sense that “things can’t be done differently, because the feds require it this way.” This is often not the case, with federal regulations providing significantly more flexibility to the states than sometimes acknowledged – and federal agencies routinely working with states to identify innovative solutions. Careful analysis of federal programmatic and funding requirements can create opportunities to “blend and braid” funding streams, resulting in both greater program access and more optimal use of



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taxpayer resources. Use the transition process to reexamine old ways of thinking and consider new possibilities.

- Determine metrics to evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of consolidated system:** One challenge identified through conversations with Missouri and Colorado was the difficulty in determining and setting metrics for a “successful” consolidated early childhood system. Critical analysis of state-level consolidation is essential to ensuring that families, communities, and service providers are navigating a new system with greater ease because most states have been motivated to consolidated systems based on feedback that communities have experienced significant difficulty working through siloed or fragmented processes. New or consolidated agencies must find ways to ensure that transformations of early childhood systems are having their intended effect—increasing efficiency, creating a return on investment, and delivering improved outcomes for the populations they serve. Determining the metrics and evaluating those systems has proven difficult given many states do not have a baseline to operate from and cannot fully compare changes caused by the consolidation of services.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOUR (June 27-30, 2023)

In accordance with the requirements set out by Executive Order 23-01 (and as recommended by sister state leaders), the Early Childhood Transition Task Force recently held listening sessions designed to engage community stakeholders. Over the course of four days, the Task Force hosted regional meetings in 9 Kansas communities (Chanute, Wichita, Garden City, Hays, Salina, Manhattan, Topeka, Overland Park, and Kansas City). Each session began with a short overview of the Task Force’s work and charge, then transitioned participants into facilitated small group discussions centered around a set of three guiding questions:



1. What challenges, gaps, or barriers have you and your community faced while navigating the early childhood system? What are the greatest needs you and your community are facing?
2. What services and programs are currently working on the local level and serve as bright spots for progress in supporting young children and families? What innovation is occurring in your community that could become models for practice in other regions and statewide?
3. How would you evaluate the state’s efficiency in providing support to you and your community in the early childhood sector? How has the State of Kansas—and the programs it operates—contributed to your successes and challenges? (For example, how has the state’s operation of childcare licensing, home visiting, childcare subsidy, or other programs impacted your experience navigating the system?)

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Notetakers in each small group captured stakeholder feedback. Participants were also provided with note cards – and a contact address at The Hunt Institute - through which to share additional perspectives. Following small group discussion of these three questions, participants shared summaries of their discussions and responses.

An overview of the feedback generated from these community listening sessions will be synthesized and shared in the Task Force’s final report.

### NEXT STEPS

The Task Force is scheduled to meet next in Topeka on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023, for a facilitated work session during which The Hunt Institute will share a synthesis of lessons learned from the listening tour and initial meetings, then guide participants in the formulation of an initial set of recommendations for use in compiling an initial draft of the group’s final report for review during its fourth meeting on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The draft and the recommendations contained will be the topic of discussion during the October meeting, following which member feedback will be used to create a proposed final draft and required sample legislation enacting the group’s recommendations.

The Task Force hopes to deliver its final report to Governor Kelly in December 2023, prior to the deadline of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, set forth in Executive Order 23-01. Following the delivery of the final report and any additional 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.

ADDITIONAL TASK FORCE RESOURCES CAN BE ACCESSED BY [CLICKING HERE](#).