

**Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force
Draft Recommendations of the Working Groups
October 18, 2023**

1. Programmatic Movements

1.1 A unified early childhood entity should co-locate a variety of programs encompassing child care, early childhood grants and services, and home visiting.

1.2 Currently, state programs impacting the delivery of child care services are spread across the Kansas Department for Children and Families, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund. All identified programs relating to child care (serving children of all ages) should be realigned under one entity to ensure adequate collaboration and drive statewide strategies on child care. This new entity should serve as the central point for improving the child care system across the state.

1.2.1 Child Care Assistance and Child Care Quality (currently located at DCF) and Child Care Licensing (currently at KDHE) should be transferred to the new entity to ensure adequate alignment across the child care sector through the combination of child care quality programs, funding streams, and licensure.

1.2.2 Transition planning should ensure that families have easy access to enrollment in economic support programs, including the child care subsidy program, both during transition and in the long-term. Strategies to ensure ease of access to these programs should include a review of the intake process for each program, including any updates to IT systems needed to simplify the eligibility review and enrollment process. Consideration should include the possibility that an MOU may be necessary between the new entity and DCF to ensure collaboration and continuity of operations.

1.3 The Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, their programming, and operations should be embedded in the new entity.

1.3.1 The Kansas Children’s Cabinet Board should retain its statutory authority (K.S.A. 38-1901) charging it – among other tasks – with assisting the Governor in developing a coordinated, comprehensive service delivery system to serve the children and families of Kansas, the identification of service gaps and the facilitation of interagency and interdepartmental cooperation toward the common goal of serving children and families. The Kansas Children’s Cabinet Board should also retain its designation as the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council in accordance with the federal Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (Kansas Executive Order 20-02).

1.3.2 Within the consolidated entity, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet Board should retain statutory (K.S.A. 38-2103) responsibility for reviewing, assessing, and evaluating all uses of the Children’s Initiatives Fund (CIF), funded through the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY Fund), and the programs funded using those dollars. The Kansas Children’s Cabinet Board should act as the main grant maker for the new entity and approve of the awarding of current or new grant programs that may be developed and administered by the new entity.

1.3.3 The Kansas Children’s Cabinet Board should not have direct oversight of other programming administered by the new entity, specifically, but not limited to, the management of child care subsidy, child care quality, child care licensing, and home visiting programs. These specific

programs, and others, should be administered by staff located in the new entity and report to the entity's administrative leadership, not the Children's Cabinet Board. Methods of coordination/collaboration between the Children's Cabinet Board and the entity's administrative leadership, rather than the Children's Cabinet Board.

1.4 Currently, home visiting programs are administered and/or funded by the Kansas Department for Children and Families, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund, and the Kansas State Department of Education. The new entity should include the colocation of home visiting programs currently administered by these four agencies to create a continuum of care, rather than the current fragmented approach that currently exists within the state.

1.4.1 One entity providing oversight and vision for home visiting should lead to enhanced collaboration among the multiple providers of the various models of home visiting offered in the state.

1.4.2 The programs that should be consolidated under one entity include:

- Healthy Families America (DCF)
- Parents as Teachers (KSDE)
- Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Home Visiting (KDHE)
- Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) (KDHE)

1.5 Head Start programming and operational supports currently housed within the Kansas Department of Children and Families, should be transitioned to the new, consolidated entity.

1.5.1 The programs that should be consolidated under one entity include:

- Head Start Collaboration Office (DCF)
Kansas Early Head Start Child Care Partnership and Kansas Early Head Start Home Visitation (DCF)

1.6 Programs focused primarily on health outcomes should remain at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, but structures should be put in place to ensure adequate collaboration exists between these health-focused programs and early childhood services administered by the consolidated entity.

1.6.1 The new entity should consider appointing a dedicated administrator to work across program type and state agencies to ensure alignment between home visiting and these types of health-oriented programs.

1.6.2 The Department of Health and Environment should establish a senior leadership position for an early childhood specialist(s) in the Division of Health Care Finance, with a strong focus on supporting optimal health and development (including social and emotional development) in the early life stages of infants and young children (birth to kindergarten entry), and their caregivers. Early childhood specialists would be responsible for promoting investments centered on prevention and early-intervention activities, supporting dyadic care (for young children and their caregivers, together), and achieving parity in addressing and supporting both physical and behavioral health. Such specialists are equipped to leverage their practical understanding of the connection between early health and early learning and how to build and improve care delivery systems that are person-centered, provider team-based, and respectful and supportive of caregivers and community.

1.7 Preschool programs housed in the Kansas State Department of Education should remain in their current locations given the prevalence of these programs being administered by local unified school districts and some elements of their funding are provided through the school finance formula, both of which are under the purview of the Department.

1.8 Programs focused primarily on child welfare (child protective services, foster care, adoption) should remain at the Kansas Department for Children and Families, including prevention programs funded through the federal Families First Program. However, structures should be put in place to ensure adequate collaboration exists between these child welfare focused programs early childhood services administered by the consolidated entity.

1.8.1 The consolidated entity should consider appointing a centralized administrator to work across program types and state agencies to ensure alignment between home visiting and these types of child welfare and child welfare prevention programs.

2. Transition Logistics

2.1 Kansas should streamline its early childhood governance structure by consolidating early childhood care and education services into a single state entity—reforming our coordinated system into a consolidation or creation model.

2.1.1 Governor Kelly should consider both consolidating services into an existing agency or creating a new agency/entity. Both options should be considered, as consolidation is needed, regardless of the form it takes.

2.1.2 The consolidated entity should be located within the Executive Branch, be led by an executive administrator, and operate under the jurisdiction of the Governor. The consolidated entity should appear on the state's organizational chart and serve as its own fiscal agent.

2.1.3 The administrator of the consolidation should report to the Governor and serve at their pleasure. The administrator shall either be considered a permanent member of the Governor's Cabinet or be elevated to serve in the Cabinet at the Governor's discretion.

2.1.4 Governor Kelly and the Executive Branch should work together with the Kansas Legislature to determine what method and mechanism of consolidation is preferable and will ensure successful implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.

2.2 The consolidation of state programs should be administered on the following timeline:

- **Enactment Period/Legal Authorization: January-May 2024**
- **Initial Transition Preparation: June-August 2024**
- **Transition Period—Implementation Team Created: September 1, 2024**
- **New Entity/Department Established: July 1, 2025**
- **Consolidation Completed: By July 1, 2026**

2.2.1.1 During the enactment period, Governor Kelly should work with the Kansas Legislature to determine the best method for consolidation and enact the preferred form.

2.2.1.2 Between the enactment and FY25 fiscal year, initial transition operations should commence. See Recommendation 2.4 for details on this period.

2.2.1.3 Throughout FY25, transition planning should be led by a Transition Director and Interagency Advisory Team as outlined in Recommendation 2.5.

2.2.1.4 On July 1, 2025, entity leadership should be identified, appointed, and installed to oversee the operations of the new entity and continue the work for transitioning programs and services. By July 1, 2025, a transition timeline for all programs should be established to identify those programs to be transferred effective July 1, 2025, and those to be transferred during the course of SFY 2026, no later than June 30, 2026.

2.2.1.5 By July 1, 2026, all programs identified for colocation in this report should be transferred to the consolidated entity and be administered by that entity.

2.3 Governor Kelly should utilize the FY25 budget to provide seed funding that invests in the proper transition of services, rather than formally reallocating funding streams attached to specific programs to the consolidated entity. Funding for programs and the entity, inclusive of additional labor costs (i.e. temporary staff, overtime costs, and outside contracted services), should be included in the FY26 budget to allow for additional time to unravel funding streams and ensure adequate programmatic transfers—allowing the consolidated entity to be operational at the beginning of FY26 on July 1, 2025.

2.4 Following the enactment of the consolidated entity, the Governor’s Office should initiate transition activities by searching for a Transition Director, as outlined in Rec 2.5 below, identifying agency consolidation leads, and initiating consolidation procedures prior to July 1, 2024.

2.5 The Governor’s Office should hire a Transition Director beginning on July 1, 2024, to provide strategic policy oversight, serve as an interagency convener, and manage the day-to-day logistics of agency consolidation. The Transition Director should be experienced in operational mergers and have an understanding of state government systems; direct state government operational merger/reorganization experience strongly preferred.

2.5.1 To assist the Transition Director, an interagency project team comprised of current staff from KDHE, DCF, KCCTF, and KSDE should be empaneled to support the technical and operational elements of agency consolidation. This group should be tasked with assisting the Transition Director, oversee the integration of IT, data, payroll, financial, and any other operational systems needed for the new entity to be prepared to administer new programs and services.

2.5.2 Each current state agency should also identify relevant program leadership to collaborate with the Transition Director on the programmatic movements into the consolidated entity.

2.5.3 Together, the interagency transition team, comprised of both program and operational staff, shall serve to support the Transition Director and implement the transition prior to the entity opening on July 1, 2025.

2.5.4 Adequate funding should be secured in FY25 to hire the Transition Director and effectively support the activities outlined in these recommendations.

2.5.5 The Transition Director and the interagency transition team should hold a series of town hall meetings with program staff who are affected by the consolidation of services to ensure they have an opportunity to provide feedback on the transition, build the culture of the consolidated entity, and support the development of collaborative administration of early childhood programs.

2.5.6 The Transition Director should not be tapped to become the permanent administrator of the consolidated entity once it becomes operational on July 1, 2025. The Transition Director should be held accountable for the transition process. New leadership should be given the

ability to enter the consolidated entity with wide latitude to operate, without being responsible for choices made during the transition.

2.5.7 If additional services are required to assist with the transition, the Governor's Office should consider combining the Transition Director with outside consulting services to create collaborative support for this process.

2.6 The Governor's Office should initiate a search process for the consolidated entity's executive leadership throughout 2024, ensuring that an administrator is identified and hired as early into the transition process as possible.

2.7 Once the entity becomes operational and leadership is installed on July 1, 2025, programs should begin moving into the consolidated entity over the course of FY26 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026). The transition should be complete, and the consolidated entity should be fully operational by July 1, 2026.

2.7.1 No interruptions in service should occur during the transition planning or transfer of programs into the consolidated entity.

2.8 Any necessary memorandum of understanding should be adopted during the transition process to ensure seamless delivery of services to children, families, and providers.

3. Metrics and Data Recommendations

3.1 While it may be challenging to judge success and efficiency, the following series of metrics should be used as benchmarks to determine whether the consolidated entity is having positive impacts for children, families, providers, and communities. Where relevant, all metrics should capture demographic information to allow for the tracking of equitable access across the early childhood system.

3.1.1 For child care subsidy, the consolidated entity should track:

- The number of families receiving child care assistance.
- The time it takes for a family to become enrolled in child care assistance.
- The number of providers enrolled to accept child care subsidy.
- The time it takes for a provider to become approved to accept child care subsidy.
- The time families or providers must wait to speak to a representative to receive enrollment or other technical assistance.
- The number of times families or providers must contact the consolidated entity to attempt to enroll in child care assistance.

3.1.2 For child care licensing and availability, the consolidated entity should track:

- The number of licensed child care slots in the state (capacity).
- The number of licensed child care facilities in the state.

- The supply and demand of child care slots in the state.
 - The number of child care facilities opened and closed.
 - The time it takes for a provider or facility to become licensed and fully operational.
 - The number of child care license applications received.
 - The number of child care closures.
 - The number of digital fingerprinting locations across the state.
 - The time between receiving fingerprints and results of a background check.
- 3.1.3 For early childhood workforce, the consolidated entity should track:
- The median wage of child care workers.
 - The number of individuals working in the early childhood field, and specifically in licensed child care facilities.
 - The retention rate of child care workers and licensed facilities.
 - The educational attainment of licensed child care providers.
 - The number of child care providers who attain a higher level of career progression in the field following their initial employment status and type of progression.
 - The number of postsecondary students enrolled in an early childhood education program in Kansas.
 - The number of postsecondary students engaged in early childhood-related practicums or on-the-job training opportunities.
- 3.1.4 For home visiting programs, the consolidated entity should track:
- The number of children and families participating in a home visiting program.
 - The number of home visits in which a child/family participates.
 - The number of different funding streams utilized for home visiting programs.
- 3.1.5 For business and industry, the consolidated entity should collaborate with the Department of Commerce to track:
- The number of businesses providing direct child care or providing financial assistance for child care to their workforce.
 - The number of businesses inquiring for state support in the development of child care opportunities for their workforce.
 - The number of businesses building child care into their economic development plans when entering incentive negotiations with the state.

- The amount of additional state incentives provided to businesses who include child care into the economic development plans when those incentive packages are negotiated.
- 3.1.6 To determine operational success and efficiency, the consolidated entity should:
- Ensure child care assistance payments can be made by the entity on Day One.
 - Ensure payroll is operational and accurate on Day One.
 - Ensure that IT systems are fully prepared and operational on Day One.
 - Ensure the public has access to the entity and is aware of its existence on Day One.
- 3.1.7 Other general metrics that the consolidated entity should track include:
- The number of children enrolled in a pre-k program.
 - Kindergarten readiness.
 - The number of children under 5 years old who die.
 - The number of children under 5 years old entering the child welfare system.
 - The amount of federal funding Kansas currently pulls down for early childhood programs.

3.2 To achieve efficiency and success, the consolidated entity should implement a robust consumer assistance program, targeted towards families and providers, to provide technical and operational support for their progression through the licensing process and/or child care assistance programs.

- 3.2.1 This program should be adequately staffed to ensure personal connection and access to individuals at the entity.

3.3 Kansas should consider the creation of a single website for easier access to the continuum of early childhood services provided to children and families. This website should include an online enrollment portal that allows families to easily determine which types of state programs and assistance for which they would qualify.

- 3.3.1 This website should be easily navigable and accessible to all Kansans regardless of their personal background.

3.4 The Kansas Department of Commerce should develop intentional outreach processes to provide support to businesses in the process of providing child care to their workforce. The Department should also begin intentionally incentivizing the inclusion of child care plans in the economic development plans created by prospective businesses looking to access the state's incentive programs.

- 3.4.1 The State should consider mandating the inclusion of child care plans in these economic development plans if a prospective businesses attempts to access the state's incentive programs.

4. Other “Game Changing” Actions

- Increase state funding for the child care sector.
- Utilize EDIF funds for businesses to include plans for child care in their economic development planning.
- Explore the creation and piloting of a cost-share program for Kansas families.
- Create a Child Care Specialist position at the Office of State Fire Marshal to prioritize the inspection and approval of child care facilities, train surveyors on child care, and ensure systematic consistency for providers across the state.
- Infant and Toddler Services (Part C) should transfer to the Department of Education to ensure greater alignment between Part B and Part C services, streamline the transition of children through these two service systems, and create a single data system to properly track the delivery of services.