How Georgia and Kansas Support Intragovernmental Partnerships

State Highlight | July 2022

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The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) initiative aims to help states improve how their comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems function. This state highlight describes how two states with different forms of governance for ECCE incorporated intragovernmental partnerships into their state governance process. Over the past 16 years, Georgia has consolidated many ECCE programs under the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). To address system gaps identified in a comprehensive ECCE needs assessment, Georgia leaders knew intragovernmental partnerships needed to extend beyond the programs administered by DECAL. Kansas administers ECCE programs and services through multiple agencies but lacked a structure to support intragovernmental partnerships between state agencies administering programs focused on children ages birth through 5. To address gaps in access and program alignment identified in a comprehensive ECCE needs assessment, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund convened a four-agency leadership team to elevate recommendations and concerns within their agencies. Both Georgia and Kansas recognize intragovernmental partnerships are crucial to support the functions of effective ECCE governance.

Intragovernmental Partnerships as a Function of ECCE Governance

Governance refers to the processes and structures created to support and organize the work of governments, organizations, and groups (Kagan & Gomez, 2015). Governance also includes a state’s placement of authority and accountability for making program policy, financing, and implementation decisions for publicly funded ECCE programs for children birth to age 5. (Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center [ECTA Center], n.d.; Regenstein & Lipper 2013). A comprehensive ECCE system encompasses a broad range of programs and services that support young children and their families, along with the infrastructure components that support those programs and services. Governance of ECCE systems can reduce fragmentation, a persistent challenge in the delivery of ECCE programs and services. Fragmentation occurs when states are not attending to the functions of ECCE programs and services, resulting in families facing difficulties navigating the resources they need.

No state has created one administrative structure that encompasses the full range of programs and services for children birth to age 5 and their families. To create cohesion, states must attend to governance for certain functions within the system, common to all models, beyond established administrative structures. Many states have created strategic partnerships to support ECCE systems-building. Strategic partnerships are “long-term relationships” that “describe a union between two or
more entities to better achieve an agreed-upon common goal and a shared vision” (Meloy et al., 2021, p. 3) Depending upon the purpose of the partnership, strategic partners may represent a smaller subsection of the comprehensive ECCE programs and services or the partners may be those with senior, state-level responsibilities. An essential function of governance in a comprehensive ECCE system is establishing intragovernmental partnerships between leaders of programs and services representing the broader system. Regardless of how a state has structured the administration of those programs and services, intragovernmental partnerships can address one or more critical functions such as policy, revenue, and funding mechanisms (ECTA Center, n.d.).

The PDG B-5 initiative focuses in part on creating new processes to improve and strengthen a state’s comprehensive ECCE system. As the states highlighted in this report have demonstrated, an important function of governance is intragovernmental partnerships (Dichter et al., 2022). Each state has the opportunity and arguably the responsibility to create and sustain intragovernmental partnerships in order to achieve a well-coordinated, effective ECCE system. Georgia and Kansas provide examples of how this can be accomplished.

Georgia

Gaps Identified Through Georgia’s Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Georgia’s PDG B-5 comprehensive ECCE needs assessment highlighted gaps attributable to disconnected governance processes. Specifically, the needs assessment revealed the following gaps between the agencies involved in developing and implementing the state’s approach for support of early childhood:

- Challenges related to aligning data systems and communications across agencies.
- Fragmented governance structures to align policy, governance, and financing in programs housed at separate agencies.
- Disparities in defining quality across programs and between age groups.
- Lack of well-supported transitions—a reflection of the need for improved coordination.
- Gaps in defining and serving populations who are ethnically diverse and or are receiving special education services.
Georgia state leaders noted they lacked a structure to support collaboration with individuals at the program level who hold the expertise and authority to implement change to address these issues. It was evident a new structure was necessary to expand working relationships with both internal programs administered by DECAL and external state partners in the ECCE system.

Georgia’s stand-alone agency, DECAL, administers Georgia’s Pre-K Program and houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office. DECAL also manages Quality Rated (Georgia’s quality rating and improvement system), child care licensing, Child Care and Development Fund planning and administration, child care assistance, resource and referral agencies, federal nutrition programs, and the state-level Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership grant. While the scope of DECAL is impressive, it does not address all of Georgia’s ECCE programs and services. Other agencies contributing to the state’s early childhood work include the Georgia Department of Public Health, which administers the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the Georgia Home Visiting Program, and the Georgia Department of Human Services, whose Division of Family and Child Services administers child welfare, foster care, and Georgia Gateway, the state’s online benefits enrollment.

Established through a 2019 executive order, Georgia’s Children’s Cabinet focuses more broadly on early childhood in the context of the birth to 18 system. The Children’s Cabinet serves as Georgia’s early childhood advisory council and sets the strategic direction for the state’s comprehensive ECCE system. The Children’s Cabinet is comprised of agency heads and officials representing the governor’s office, health, human services, education, juvenile justice, technical colleges, and a state office of advocacy for individuals with disabilities. Goals for the Children’s Cabinet focus on safety, health, literacy, and 2-generation supports for birth to 18 populations.

Changes Made: A Focus on Function Through Senior-Level Intragovernmental Partnerships

Georgia state leaders described their most significant accomplishment from the PDG B-5 grant as building stronger relationships across state agencies through creation of a new senior-level intragovernmental partnership. Planning for the PDG B-5 initiative required ECCE leaders to identify strategies to address gaps in coordination and alignment of programs identified in the needs assessment. In response, Georgia fulfilled this requirement by adding a Cross Agency Child Council to its existing infrastructure of state agencies and a broadly focused Children’s Cabinet.

The activities carried out as part of the PDG B-5 grant, as well as the insights the PDG B-5 initiative produced, led to this new Cross Agency Child Council comprised of senior-level leaders from all child- and family-serving programs and community and family advocates. This council is charged with oversight for Georgia’s PDG B-5 initiative, including reduction of the gaps identified by the comprehensive ECCE needs assessment. The Cross Agency Child Council was initially focused on guiding the development of Georgia’s comprehensive ECCE systems strategic plan. Upon receipt of the PDG B-5 renewal grant, the council guided the implementation of the strategic plan. Members are
responsible for ensuring their respective agencies follow through with actions identified by the council. The Cross Agency Child Council focuses on developing collaborative solutions at the program level and submitting recommendations for policy changes to the Children’s Cabinet. Figure 1 shows the Cross Agency Child Council's position within the state’s ECCE decision-making process. The Children’s Cabinet and Cross Agency Child Council have a common facilitator, which supports a shared vision and aligned goals and recommendations.

**Figure 1. Georgia’s ECCE Governance Structure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Cabinet (State Advisory Council)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Early Care &amp; Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Behavioral Health &amp; Developmental Disabilities</td>
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<td>Department of Community Health</td>
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<td>Department of Public Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Human Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head Start Collaboration Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appointed partner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early learning provider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocacy organizations</td>
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</table>

| Cross Agency Child Council (Created by PDG B-5 Grant) |
| Leaders from Child Serving Agencies (deputy level) |
| Community partners |
| Family Peer Ambassadors |

| Cross Agency Family Council |
| CACDS Research Committee |
| PDG Evaluation Subcommittee |
| Needs Assessment Advisory Committee |
| -Data subcommittee |

← Decision Making ← Advisory
Impact of the Cross Agency Child Council

Georgia state leaders have acknowledged the concrete benefits derived from establishing the Cross Agency Child Council. The council creates a platform to communicate program updates, coordinate service delivery, and develop collaborative solutions to certain functions common to multiple programs and services represented on the council. Programs administered under DECAL previously had varying degrees of collaboration, but there was no structure to strengthen how programs internal to DECAL and those administered through external state agencies could work collaboratively to create new processes to enhance the comprehensive ECCE system. Georgia leaders specifically pointed to accomplishments in strengthening intragovernmental partnerships between DECAL and nutrition programs and mental health services administered by external state agencies.

For example, before the Cross Agency Child Council was established, there was no structured process for collaboration at the program level between DECAL and WIC. As members of the Cross Agency Child Council, WIC leaders brought before the council a need to provide information and support to families on the transition to a new electronic benefits transfer (EBT) system. The council was aware that many families participating in ECCE programs also receive WIC benefits. Accordingly, the council collaboratively developed a communications plan to inform families about the EBT transition while families were receiving other ECCE services. Participating families benefited from receiving consistent information about the EBT transition. Also, by opening communications with families about receiving WIC benefits, ECCE program staff learned skills for supporting families who receive nutrition benefits.

Additionally, under the PDG B-5 initiative, Georgia conducted a landscape analysis of infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH) services. This analysis highlighted the absence of a state system for IECMH services, identified gaps in workforce and professional development, and called attention to a need for policies to support service delivery and funding. During the 2020 session, the Georgia legislature created a new position for an IECMH director within DECAL to create cohesion in the state’s IECMH system. The position was created to build partnerships with existing state mental health services and to support a task force to address system-level gaps. The IECMH director submits reports to the Cross Agency Child Council to inform the council’s recommendations on the state’s IECMH system as identified in the strategic plan.

Sustaining Georgia’s Intragovernmental Partnerships

With the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant, DECAL established a cross-agency group to support the grant, but this group disbanded when the grant ended. The PDG B-5 initiative provided DECAL an opportunity to again create a structure for convening senior-level program leaders, advocates, and community and family representatives to conduct a needs assessment, develop a
strategic plan, and oversee the implementation of the plan. Looking ahead and recognizing that collaboration with partners is not a short-term objective, Georgia state leaders created the Cross Agency Child Council with the intent that the council will continue to meet beyond the PDG B-5 initiative.

**Kansas**

**Gaps Identified Through Kansas' Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

The Kansas PDG B-5 comprehensive ECCE needs assessment identified gaps in their ECCE system attributable to system fragmentation. Specific gaps included the following:

- Inequitable access to high-quality programs and services for families with young children caused by a gap between needs and availability and difficulties experienced by families in navigating services.

- Early childhood workforce needs at both the leadership and direct service levels, including preparation, compensation or financial relief, ongoing training and support, and recruitment and retention.

- Needs related to the physical conditions and environments of early childhood facilities across the state.

- A shared desire for collaboration and cooperation among early childhood providers and stakeholders, but often disconnected and uncoordinated efforts.

- A need for greater systems alignment to fully realize an efficient and robust ECCE infrastructure.

Kansas had a cabinet structure in place—the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund—to make broad policy recommendations for birth to 18 populations. However, Kansas lacked a structure to support functions common to ECCE programs housed in multiple state agencies. For example, there were regulations in place that prohibited blending of funds at the community level and collaboration was not encouraged. The state’s senior-level ECCE leaders were operating autonomously. System fragmentation was evidenced in the needs assessment, which was deeply informed by family and community voices. The impact of a lack of cohesion at the state level was expressed by families who were unable to navigate the ECCE system. The activities undertaken through the PDG B-5 initiative convinced state leaders they could no longer operate in silos to improve outcomes. The state took the opportunity to fill a gap in the decision-making process.

**Changes Made: A Focus on Function Within the Existing Structure**

Kansas decided to leverage its existing Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund to address the fragmentation and other issues identified through the comprehensive ECCE needs assessment. Kansas formed a State Directors Team consisting of senior-level ECCE leaders from four agencies.
The agencies represented on the State Directors Team are the 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. The Team’s purpose is to build collaboration and to ensure efficient and effective use of funding to support families with young children. The State Directors Team is supported by and reports directly to the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund.

Before deciding to create the State Directors Team, Kansas conducted a review of governance structures of the state’s ECCE system. Established in 1999, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund comprises 15 members, nine of whom are political appointees, and six department heads representing child-serving state agencies (Forum for Youth Investment, n.d.). Pursuant to Executive Order No. 20-02, the Cabinet is the designated State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care. During the review of governance structures conducted in response to the ECCE needs assessment, Kansas considered options to administratively consolidate programs as a strategy to create efficiencies and align program functions. The state concluded that the political environment, with the governor providing strong support for ECCE, meant the structure of the current administration did not need to be changed. Instead, what was needed was a framework to support intragovernmental partnerships to improve the governance of ECCE programs and services. Although the Children’s Cabinet was intended to create system cohesion, the comprehensive ECCE needs assessment demonstrated something was lacking in coordination of services for young children and their families.

The creation of the State Directors Team filled a gap in the decision-making process in Kansas. The State Directors Team intentionally ensures all recommendations generated from all partners are aligned to the comprehensive ECCE systems strategic plan. The addition of the State Directors Team provides the level of programmatic review and feedback necessary to ensure that programs and services are coordinated and aligned across agencies and that recommendations are feasible in the context of program policy and funding requirements of the different agencies and funding streams. The state directors are committed to meeting frequently and are in positions to elevate recommendations and concerns within their agencies. Before the PDG B-5 initiative, Kansas agencies supporting ECCE had separate advisory and governing boards, many of which were necessitated by grant requirements. With the creation of the State Directors Team, which meets every other week, recommendations from these boards can be communicated, coordinated, and, when indicated, implemented in collaboration with other ECCE programs. Figure 2 depicts the State Directors Team’s position within the Kansas’s ECCE governance structure.
Kansas Early Childhood Governance Structure

GOVERNOR

KANSAS CHILDREN’S CABINET AND TRUST FUND
(Designated as the STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE)

STATE DIRECTORS TEAM

EARLY CHILDHOOD RECOMMENDATIONS PANEL

Kansas Family Leadership Team
State Intergency Coordinating Council
Links to Quality (Quality Rating and Improvement System)
Child Care Systems Improvement Team

Home Visiting Leadership Group
ECCE Workforce Development Committee
Maternal Child Health Council
Governor’s Behavioral Health Services Planning Council’s Children’s Subcommittee

EARLY CHILDHOOD STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

1. Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund (Cabinet): Statutory role to assist the Governor in developing and implementing a coordinated, comprehensive service delivery system to the children and families of Kansas. Pursuant to Executive Order No. 20-02, the Cabinet is the designated State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care. Meets every other month.

2. State Directors Team: Composed of State Directors Team members (Cabinet designees). Meets every two weeks.

3. Early Childhood Recommendations Panel: Pursuant to Executive Order No. 20-02, volunteers are convened by the Cabinet in an advisory role. Meets monthly.

Impact of the State Directors Team

The State Directors Team has made progress in many areas. One outcome from the team’s work includes the use of the state’s strategic plan for early childhood to inform decisions on the allocation of COVID-19 pandemic recovery funds. Directors reported they have developed stronger collaboration to help ensure the funds are used efficiently to support families and children. For example, there are seven models of home visiting in Kansas, administered across three agencies with varying degrees of intensity depending upon the type of intervention and support needed: Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, Parents as Teachers, Attachment & Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC) Intervention, Nurse-Family Partnerships, Team for Infants Endangered by Substance Abuse (TIES) and Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. State Directors Team accomplishments include the completion of a landscape analysis to understand the availability of home visiting programs, implementation of an updated and aligned professional development plan for all

“PDG B-5 is the connective tissue that holds the structure of Kansas’s comprehensive ECCE system together.” Melissa Rooker, Executive Director, Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund
home visiting providers, and establishment of goals for expansion of a more cohesive home visiting system.

**Sustaining Kansas’s Intragovernmental Partnerships**

The Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund plans to sustain the State Directors Team beyond the PDG B-5 initiative, as the team is now formally embedded in the ECCE governance structure. However, state leaders stress that, had this intragovernmental partnership been created without value added to the governance process, the state would have considered disbanding the team. The State Directors Team is committed to working together to solve problems, evaluating funding to ensure appropriate allocation, being transparent about their work, creating a continuous feedback loop, and seeking input from community partners.

**Conclusion**

Strategic, intragovernmental partnerships are a necessary function regardless of a state's form of governance. Kansas and Georgia both have leveraged the PDG B-5 opportunity to construct similar viable, effective intragovernmental partnerships. For example, both Georgia and Kansas created new working groups of state agency leaders who report to children’s cabinets and who serve as content and programmatic experts to vet recommendations from multiple advisory boards to ensure coordination and alignment across programs. In both states, the needs assessment data highlighted gaps in families' access to ECCE programs and services, in support for the ECCE workforce, and in the quality of equitable implementation across programs. The findings alerted both states to the need for better coordination. Both states also recognized that a change in one component of the comprehensive ECCE system impacts other components.

Despite high-level officials already serving on children’s cabinets, state agency leaders with knowledge of program policy and funding were missing in the decision-making process. Each state concluded that intragovernmental partnerships between staff with responsibility and knowledge of ECCE programs and services are a necessary function of effective governance and will ultimately lead to a more cohesive comprehensive ECCE system.

Supporting intragovernmental partnerships between existing programs within a state’s comprehensive ECCE system is a necessary function to improve and strengthen a state’s ECCE system. Regardless of the form of governance, a comprehensive ECCE system requires intragovernmental partnerships.

The Child Care Technical Assistance Network’s National Technical Assistance Center for Preschool Development Grants Birth Through Five (PDG B-5 TA) website contains additional resources for states on this topic. Visit [Establishing Governance and Sustainable Partnerships | Child Care Technical Assistance Network (hhs.gov)] for more information.
References


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