

EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA

A STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR 2020-2025



JUNE 2021

An Update from the Governance Task Force

BACKGROUND

In September 2020, a statewide early childhood strategic plan, [Early Childhood Alaska: A Strategic Direction for 2020-2025](#) was finalized and later adopted by Alaska's Early Childhood Coordinating Council in March 2021.

A specific strategy under Goal 3 of the plan (Alaska Children and Families are supported by a Functional, Comprehensive, Mixed-Delivery Early Childhood System) was to form a governance workgroup with a focus on creating an improved, sustainable, and accountable governance approach with decision-making authority.

Goal 3: "Strategy 12.2 - Create an improved, sustainable and accountable governance approach with decision-making authority."

Actions:

- *Form a work group with the specific goal of designing an improved approach to governance, with consultant support. Through a consensus-building process, the group will propose a design for a new approach to governance for the early childhood system that includes structure, form, function, and funding.*
- *Engage families, communities, public and private partners and other stakeholders in the design of an improved early childhood governance approach in Alaska.*
- *Ensure the governance design includes sustainable staffing capacity for implementing this 5-year strategic plan.*
- *Ensure the governance design includes funding for performance management and evaluation to implement the 5-year strategic plan.*
- *Provide a written proposal for an improved design for governing Alaska's early childhood system.*

GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP & PROCESS

As the larger Joint Task Force completed its strategic planning work in late 2019, it was determined that a smaller and more focused workgroup should continue the work to focus specifically on the governance strategy as stated in the plan. Membership of the workgroup was identified from the larger task force with the group's best effort to balance statewide, regional, public and private perspectives.

Workgroup "Tri-Leads" were identified by an open process in which members were asked to apply to the larger group with a focus on public and private representation balance. The three representative agencies are the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, and the State of Alaska Child Care Program Office.

Membership is comprised of representatives from tribal, community-based and state agency early childhood partners committed to the change process. A current roster of participants is available on the last page of this document.

Each month since early 2020 the Workgroup has been meeting virtually, and is currently preparing for the next phases of planning and outreach beginning summer 2021.

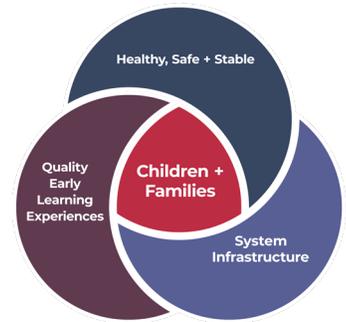
GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE DECISIONS TO DATE

Our vision: *Alaska's children and families thrive in a strong and equitable early childhood system.**

This means that:

- Alaska children and families are healthy, safe, and stable.
- Alaska children have quality early learning experiences and are prepared for success in school.
- Alaska children and families are supported by a functional, comprehensive, mixed-delivery early childhood system.

**Alaska's early childhood system includes any program or service that provides supports to the whole child, and crosses sectors such as health, mental health, early care and education, social services and family supports, prenatal to age 8.*



Key understandings about governance:

Key understandings of the work are grounded in the work of the recent Alaska Early Childhood Environmental Scan and the Alaska Early Childhood Needs Assessment.

1. Governance is a strategy to help achieve our vision.
2. Our governance plan should enable us to address key challenges:

KEY CHALLENGES

Many young children in Alaska are living in families that are low income or living in poverty.

- There is a lack of equity in how public early childhood funds are spent across the state.
- Some parts of the state have fewer resources for children and families.

Lack of sufficient investment in Alaska's young children—the most critical phase of human development—contributes to the achievement gap and poor health outcomes.

- Without coordinated and priority-driven large-scale investment, benefits to young children can't fully be realized.

The early childhood system is fragmented, creating a scattershot of separate systems, funding streams, and decision-making authority. There is no leadership to ensure coordination and decision-making across the continuum of programs and funding streams that make up the breadth of the early childhood system.

- The Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC) which is charged with coordinating only a few programs within these systems, has no capacity, dedicated staff, or budget. The AECCC is not a policy, programming, or funding decision maker. Additionally, membership of the AECCC lacks balance between the public sector and private sector interests.
- Accountability and data collection function in multiple separate systems. They also vary across program and funding goals, making it difficult to produce an annual report or issue recommendations to the Governor or Legislature.
- Alaska lacks a comprehensive infrastructure for building intentional and coordinated relationships with local agencies, rural and remote communities, school districts, Tribal organizations, and early childhood coalitions.
- The separate funding streams and program requirements create an overwhelming burden for families, providers, local decision makers, and stakeholders.

3. Our governance plan will support implementation of the Alaska Early Childhood Strategic Plan and its call for reduced fragmentation, increased coordination, greater accountability and transparency, and greater leadership on policy, financing, and planning for a more sustainable and equitable early childhood system.
4. Our governance plan will have a primary focus on these programs and funding streams in the new governance approach: Child Care and Development Fund, State PreK, Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) Part B & Part C Early Intervention Infant Learning Program, Head Start Collaboration, Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems.
5. Our governance plan will address coordination of the programs in (4) above with these programs and funding streams require a coordination approach: Women’s, Infants, and Children, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Early Learning Grants, Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting; Title V; Immunization; and children’s mental health programming (a blend), Office of Children’s Services.

Key Dimensions of Governance:
Functions: The actions this new governance will carry out to be effective.
Form: The structure of new governance entity(s).
Durability: Features (levers) of the new governance entity(s) that allows it to be sustained over time and across political and economic shifts (e.g. good stewardship; culture of the governance entity; staff capability; private sector role)

FUNCTIONS

The core functions—or actions— need to be clearly defined for a governance entity or entities to achieve its priorities. The functions below are integral to an early childhood system and were identified by the workgroup as critical to a new model for Alaska:

- 1. Accountability:**
 - The governance model should be accountable to the early childhood system and its stakeholders in terms of quality, equity, and outcomes.
 - Holds services and programs accountable for their performance.
 - Includes compliance, data (collection and analysis);, monitoring and alignment (non-duplicative, streamlined).
- 2. Data:**
 - Coordination and integration of early childhood data [to reduce duplication of efforts and lead to greater efficiency and better outcomes]
 - Creation and maintenance and alignment of data systems.
- 3. Collaboration:**
 - Within the entity; across entities and external.
 - An intentional way of working together and sharing information for the purpose of setting state-level priorities and achieving specific statewide goals.

4. Program, Policy, and Financial Planning:

- Programmatic and policy planning, including evaluation.
- Use of high-quality data and information (qualitative and quantitative) to monitor and set policy and strategic direction.
- Financial planning, including budgeting (based on report card), cost modeling, financial forecasting, identification of revenue sources.

5. Allocation:

- Allocation of financial and human resources in a set strategic direction.
- Harnessing the funding so that it works more synergistically.
- Decisions around budgeting and managing resources.
- Distributing funds to pay for programs/services.
- Identification of resources across the funding streams and educate about how they work, and what is covered and the gaps that remain.

6. Outreach and engagement with stakeholders & partners (tribes):

- Identifying community and family needs
- Using family and community expertise..
- Engaging stakeholders and partners in the development of policy and program. As relevant, determining family/child eligibility for publicly funded services and programs.

7. Communication:

- Education and improving general awareness amongst specific audiences, such as the general public, elected officials, the media, and key opinion leaders. [Supports function of accountability for good stewardship of taxpayer dollars].
- Communicate about the goals, the status of young children and what we are achieving in the early childhood system (e.g. an annual report).

8. Regulations, Setting Standards and Improving Quality

♦ Regulating:

- Align regulation across departments to reduce programmatic barriers.
- Advise regulation development following statutory change.

♦ Set and Align Standards:

- Setting standards for programs and services
- Setting standards for Professionals
- Setting child development and learning standards

9. Authority:

- Must have the ability to make decisions and follow an identified decision-making process.
- Clear roles and responsibilities with statutory obligations and authorities.
- Authority enables a governance entity to perform its functions on behalf of the early childhood system.

EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE

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