



EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is early childhood governance?

Early childhood governance refers to a state's organizational structures and its placement of authority and accountability for making program policy, financing, and implementation decisions for publicly funded programs for young children. Governance is how authority and accountability for certain functions is allocated.

Why would anyone want to reorganize Alaska's early childhood program oversight?

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

Who is advocating for a re-envisioned early childhood governance model? Who has fed into the discussion thus far?

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.

This effort includes a volunteer taskforce comprised of representatives from a myriad of private sector and public sector early childhood specialists, providers and advocates. The task force is about to embark on a series of community roundtable listening sessions to stress-test the proposed model, which is currently in draft form for discussion.

What's the general concept of re-envisioned early childhood governance in Alaska?

The re-envisioned early childhood governance model has been discussed for decades. Recently, consensus recommendations for a new early childhood governance model drafted by the volunteer taskforce would place authority and accountability for early childhood programming in a new public division under one of Alaska's current state departments. In addition to consolidating public early



EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA

childhood programs, the governance model would create a structure (such as a board or commission) to develop and monitor a statewide strategic plan and evaluate the effectiveness of programs within a new division of early childhood. This is a reputable governance model that exists in states across the nation that can be replicated in Alaska.

How far along is the project?

This early childhood governance project is still in draft form. This FAQ includes responses to initial questions raised by stakeholders and will be updated as more input is received **and more questions are asked**. We expect feedback to help improve and shape the recommendations.

Does this mean there could be a new division within some government department?

Possibly. A new division was the consensus recommendation of the taskforce for the purpose of a draft model. There may be both advantages and disadvantages of forming a new division; surfacing pros and cons and new ideas is part of the purpose of hosting community roundtables.

How does this project impact *private* child care providers?

The governance change under consideration is how state-level governance works. The draft model includes both a public sector structure and a private sector structure that work together at the state-level around state-level funding, policy, programs, and supports. This project is not about designing governance for local-level funding, policy, or programs. Private child care business are impacted by state-level policy, i.e., licensing, subsidies, state pre-K, early intervention. Private child care providers that receive public funding are impacted by state-level decisions. The hope is that a coherent governance structure would bring strategic purpose and efficiency in how state policy is set in the future.

Who would staff the state system?

Most if not all of the government staff who carry out the important work of providing services related to childcare and early childhood health and education already exist. A realignment could help them perform their work in a more coordinated fashion. Additionally, the draft model contemplates a new division director as well as five to seven new staff, including an executive director and administrative staff, to support the work of a new board.

Who would serve on an early childhood commission/board?

Stakeholders and officials such as private childcare and early childhood program providers, healthcare providers, tribal representatives, and commissioners or designees from the Dept. of Education & Early Development, the Dept. of Health, and the Dept. of Family & Community Services, a majority of whom would represent direct service providers.



EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA

What kind of authorities would be needed to stand up a new governance model for early childhood?

The division would be written in statute and the board would be authorized by law.

What kind of roles and responsibilities would be taken on by a division director and commission/board member?

The division director would have authority to administer early childhood programs, set policy, and have a seat at the department decision-making table regarding budgets and policy. The divisions would have the authority to receive federal and state public funding and to grant and contract for services. The division would design protocols, processes, and guidance for service delivery. The division would engage, consult, and coordinate with Tribes to increase and strengthen government-to-government relationships. The division would make decisions about regulatory or policy change and would serve as key contact for legislative inquiries. The division would develop and support implementation of programs so that they align with the Comprehensive Plan for Early Childhood.

The commission/board would have voting approval for implementation of plans, review of division budget and how proposed budgets align with strategic and implementation plans. The commission/board could be comprised of up to 15 members, appointed by the governor with staggered 3-year terms, who represent a diversity of regions, sectors, communities, tribes, and health and education providers. The commission/board would engage in recruitment of division director. The commission/board would issue reports to the legislature and periodic public updates on plans, activities, recommendations, and on the state of early childhood and equity within the system. The commission/board would actively engage in identification of public and private sector investment in early childhood field and would be the convener for the public-private financing conversation to increase investment in early childhood. The commission/board would consider the role of early childhood within the continuum of early childhood, K-12, and post-secondary. The commission/board would advise the legislature and governor and would have the budgetary authority to accept and administer funds to support core early childhood functions.

Which existing divisions are we talking about?

This is a preliminary conceptual draft list and in no way is meant to suggest any decisions have been made about how re-alignment might look. That said, there are some obvious state divisions and programs that could potentially live within a new early childhood umbrella division: Child Care, Early Childhood Comprehensive Services, Head Start State Collaboration Office, state-funded Head Start, state Pre-K, Early childhood mental health consultation, early literacy, food programs (e.g., CACFP, WIC), MIECHV, PAT, Infant Early Learning program, Strengthening Families... and coordinated with Title V, Federal Pre-K (619 & Title 1A) and Head Start (federal), behavioral health, OCS.

How does DHSS “bifurcation” impact this early childhood governance discussion?



EARLY CHILDHOOD ALASKA

Current discussions about the potential benefits of realignment of early childhood programs is separate and distinct from the split of DHSS (or “bifurcation”) into the Dept. of Health and the Dept. of Family & Community Services. The discussion about realigning early childhood programs under one umbrella has a history that predates DHSS bifurcation. And the lessons of realignment being learned at DHSS today could provide a roadmap for eventual realignment of early childhood programs.

Alaska is unique in its special relationship with Alaska Native tribes and cultures. Are tribes being included in discussions and in the draft governance model?

The early childhood governance taskforce believes tribal representation and engagement is fundamental to the design and eventual restructure and makeup of early childhood governance. Coordination and collaboration with Alaska’s tribes at every step of the process is key to any effort to lift up Alaska’s children.

Why now? Aren’t there plenty of other more pressing issues for the state?

There is never an easy time to realign government systems but, perhaps, as the state undertakes a far larger reorganization (of DHSS) the relative ease of this conceptual realignment will be obvious. Furthermore, should the larger reorganization of DHSS into two departments necessitate “cleanup” legislation, this could prove to be an ideal window of time to advance this long-discussed realignment of early childhood programs.

How will this impact funding, funding relationships, coordination across sectors/agencies, and monitoring relationships?

This question highlights one of the many reasons we are undertaking stakeholder engagement. We are in the process of surfacing and examining this very question, so any possible realignment is structured to ensure maximum access to public, private, and philanthropic support.

How can I be involved?

The early childhood governance taskforce will continue to meet with providers, employees, and other stakeholders to address questions about the proposal and refine implementation planning. The task force also hosts community meetings from time to time; check <https://earlychildhoodalaska.com/governance/> for information about conversations that have taken place thus far and about future meeting dates. Additionally, you can contact the EC Governance team regarding any questions, concerns, or input on the draft governance structure at outreach@earlychildhoodalaska.com.