

Ensuring that every New Mexico child is
eager to learn and ready to succeed in school

Strategic Plan & Recommendations

New Mexico Early Learning
Advisory Council

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BACKGROUND OF THE EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COUNCIL

In 2011, the New Mexico Early Childhood Care and Education Act was enacted to create the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) as SB120.

New Mexico's SB120 states that an early childhood care and education system is vital in ensuring that every New Mexico child is eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten, that high quality early learning experiences have been proven to prepare children for success in school and later in life, and that cost-benefit research demonstrates a high return on investment for money spent on early childhood care and education for at-risk children.

A successful early childhood care and education system should be:

- I. Developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and include the implementation of program models, standards, and curriculum based on research and best practices
- II. Data-driven, including the identification and prioritization of communities most at risk, while striving to make the system universally available to all who wish to participate
- III. Accountable through developmentally appropriate methods of measuring, reporting, and tracking a child's growth and development and the improvement of the system's programs
- IV. Accessible, especially to those children most at risk of school failure
- V. Of the highest possible quality through the utilization of qualified practitioners who have completed specialized training in early childhood growth, development, and learning that is specific to that practitioner's role in the system and the maintenance of quality rating methods for the programs in the system
- VI. Fully aligned within each community to ensure the most efficient and effective use of resources by combining funding sources and supporting seamless transitions for children within the system and for children transitioning into kindergarten
- VII. Family-centered by recognizing that parents and caregivers are the first and most important teachers of their children and providing the support and referrals necessary for parents and caregivers to assume this critical role in their child's development
- VIII. A partnership between the state and private individuals or institutions with an interest or expertise in early childhood care and education

The purpose of the Early Childhood Care and Education Act is to establish a comprehensive early childhood care and education system through an aligned continuum of state and private programs.

The New Mexico Early Learning Advisory Council was created to ensure implementation of the Early Childhood Care and Education Act.

MISSION AND VISION OF THE EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COUNCIL

New Mexico Early Learning Advisory Council

Mission Statement

TO CREATE A QUALITY, SUSTAINABLE AND SEAMLESS EARLY CARE AND LEARNING SYSTEM RESPONSIVE TO EACH CHILD BIRTH TO AGE 5 AND THEIR FAMILY ACROSS NEW MEXICO; BY BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS, INTEGRATING SYSTEMS AND MAKING STRATEGIC, RESEARCH-BASED AND DATA-DRIVEN RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICY MAKERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

New Mexico Early Learning Advisory Council

Vision Statement

TO BE THE COLLECTIVE VOICE TO MOVE FORWARD THE EARLY CARE AND LEARNING SYSTEM IN NEW MEXICO

SUMMARY

ELAC members identified priority goals to achieve the responsibilities set forth for the council by reviewing, analyzing, and prioritizing the 2011 New Mexico SB120, the Head Start Act, and Race to the Top Application. Based on the information reviewed, the following three Priority Goals were identified:

1. High Quality Early Childhood Workforce
2. Accessibility to High Quality Early Childhood Programs
3. Improved School Readiness (now and at 3rd grade)

Priority Goal 1: High Quality Early Childhood Workforce

ELAC has determined that an effective and well-qualified workforce for the New Mexico Early Care and Learning System requires practitioners and educators with appropriate training, education, and credentials. To be successful, the early childhood workforce needs a range of competencies to support children for healthy development and success in school. Ensuring access to higher education and implementing an integrated system of professional development are key strategies to prepare, support staff who work in early care and learning settings

Priority Goal 2: Accessibility to High Quality Early Childhood Programs

The New Mexico ELAC has determined that access to high quality services for all children is critical for improving the wellbeing of New Mexico's children. This includes:

- Funding quality standards and criteria at levels that ensures accessibility for all families, provides program sustainability, and continuity of care, particularly for children whom research shows benefit most from early childhood services.
- Children with disabilities, particularly children with significant or multiple disabilities
- Full participation of children of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including family composition
- Support for children with challenging behaviors
- Addressing the needs of New Mexico's Early Childhood Investment Zones

Priority Goal 3: Improve School Readiness

According to 45 CFR Chapter XIII Head Start Regulation Part 1307.2 and 1307.3 (b) (1) (i), as amended, school readiness means that children are prepared for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are able to provide an appropriate learning environment for children. The expectations of children's status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, motor development, physical health and wellbeing, and social-emotional development are that

they will improve readiness for kindergarten goals and that they will “appropriately reflect the ages of children, birth to five, participating in the program.” Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The priority goals presented in the Executive Summary cannot come to fruition without concerted effort. As such, ELAC will make recommendations with the objective of facilitating these long-term priority goals.

According to the by-laws of ELAC, when developing recommendations the Council shall:

- a. Consider how to consolidate and coordinate resources and public funding streams for early childhood care and education, and ensure the accountability and coordinated development of all early childhood care and education services
- b. Consider a system of seamless transition from prenatal to early childhood programs to kindergarten
- c. Take into account a parent’s decisive role in the planning, operation, and evaluation of programs that aid families in the care and education of children
- d. Examine ways to provide consumer education and accessibility to early childhood care and education resources
- e. Consider the advancement of quality early childhood care and education programs in order to support the healthy development of children and preparation for their success in school
- f. Consider the development of a seamless service delivery system with local points of entry for early childhood care and education programs administered by local, state, and federal agencies
- g. Ensure effective collaboration with state and local child welfare programs and early childhood health and behavioral health programs
- h. Consider how to develop and manage effective data collection systems to support the necessary functions of a coordinated system of early childhood care and education, and track children through the education system from prenatal to early childhood to kindergarten to higher education, in order to enable accurate evaluation of the impact of early childhood care and education
- i. Focus on the diversity, cultural heritage, and strengths of the families and communities of New Mexico
- j. Consider the development of an aligned system of professional development for professionals providing early childhood care and education

- k. Consider the establishment of an administrative framework to promote the development of high quality early childhood care and education services that are staffed by well-qualified professionals, and are available in every community for all families that express a need for them.

Using these guidelines, as well as the needs of communities and the priorities outlined in previous pages, ELAC has come to the following recommendations.

Priority Goal 1 High Quality Early Childhood Workforce: Recommendations

- 1 ELAC recommends to the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) and the Governor of New Mexico that funding for provider training and education be sustained/expanded to support obtaining degrees and incentives to help with staff retention and quality.
- 2 ELAC recommends to the Higher Education Taskforce and the Public Education Department (PED), Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) and Department of Health (DOH) that a system be developed to acknowledge and apply appropriate credit from prior learning experiences to current educational situations.

Priority Goal 2 Accessibility to High Quality Early Childhood Programs: Recommendations

- 3 ELAC recommends to the DOH, CYFD, and PED that in order to prevent duplication of efforts and saturation of services, they conduct a formal needs assessment in a community before funding additional services in the community. State funds should not supplant federal funds.
- 4 ELAC recommends to the DOH, CYFD and PED that in order to meet the needs of the underserved and rural communities in New Mexico that the departments meet with community stakeholders to increase their capacity to apply for funding and consider flexible funding models to meet their needs.

- 5 ELAC supports CYFD implementation of the Child Care Block Grant reauthorization without raising parent copays, lowering eligibility or reducing slots.
- 6 ELAC recommends to CYFD that the ELAC be included in any revision of the early learning Investment Zones.
- 7 ELAC recommends to DOH, CYFD and PED that the Pyramid Framework Partnership be shared across programs as a system to support social emotional development and address the needs of children with challenging behaviors.
- 8 ELAC recommends to the LFC, DOH, CYFD, and PED that they work with ELAC and coordinate efforts when funding early childhood programs through state, federal and philanthropic opportunities. The state should maximize the use of federal and philanthropic funds in New Mexico.
- 9 ELAC recommends to the DOH, PED and CYFD that they recognize and sustain a variety of program models within the system of care in early childhood that meets the needs of families.
- 10 ELAC recommends to CYFD, PED and DOH that developmental screening information be shared between service providers to eliminate duplication of effort.
- 11 ELAC recommends to the PED that an appointed member of ELAC should be added to the committee that oversees the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) and the data included in the system.
- 12 ELAC recommends to the DOH, CYFD, and PED that all early childhood personnel serving families prenatally through children five years of age shall have training on inclusion within one year of employment.

13 ELAC recommends to PED that a plan be created to support LEAs in meeting the needs of children that need special education services so that they can be served in their typical setting and in the best interest of the child.

Priority Goal 3 Improve School Readiness (now and at 3rd grade): Recommendations

14 ELAC recommends to PED that ELAC review and provide input into the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) implementation in New Mexico.

15 ELAC encourages the CYFD, PED and DOH to adopt the 2011 definition of school readiness as a part of the Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs).

16 ELAC recommends to CYFD and PED that ELAC be involved in the determination of Kindergarten Observation Tool (KOT) criteria/cut scores for determination of school readiness for New Mexico children.

ELAC looks forward to its reauthorization and strengthening of our role in advising various departments and committees in early learning in New Mexico.

The ELAC would like to take an opportunity to thank the Children Youth and Families Department, the Public Education Department and the Department of Health for their work in the field of Early Learning and recognize the huge strides taken toward supporting an Early Learning system to meet the needs of the diverse children and families in the State of New Mexico.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Early Learning Advisory Council’s mission, “to create a quality, sustainable and seamless Early Care and Learning System responsive to each child birth to age 5 and their family across New Mexico by building partnerships, integrating systems and making strategic, research-based and data-driven recommendations to policy makers and stakeholders,” can best be met through the fulfillment of three long-term strategic goals. Each of these goals is designed to improve early childhood systems from the ground up and to create a comprehensive and cohesive strategy for maximizing childhood successes.

In order to be successful in this endeavor, each element of these long-term goals must be considered. School readiness cannot be improved systematically without a workforce that is dedicated and knowledgeable. Likewise, effective programs and staff cannot affect statewide change unless services are made available and easily accessible for children and families of all cultural backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. Missing any of these elements leads to an incomplete system. It is therefore important to view each of these goals and the recommendations therein as an important part of an overall whole, not simply individual and freestanding fragments. New Mexico must find the most efficient and effective ways to leverage state and federal funding as well as increased private investments for early childhood care and education in order to sustain our endeavors.

Additionally, in order to sustain positive changes long-term, a structure has to be in place to meet the demands of an expanded system. Without scaffolding in place to support additional needs, such as professional development and recruitment for early childhood staff, long-term goals cannot have lasting effects.