

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

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

Priority Goal 1: 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 2: 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.

Priority Goal 3: 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

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 Accessibility to High Quality Early Childhood Programs: Recommendations

- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health, the Children, Youth and Families Department and the Public Education Department that all early childhood personnel serving B-5 provide documentation of training on inclusion within one year of employment.
- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health and the Children, Youth and Families Department that they identify gaps in dual language services and develop recommendation to meet gaps. TQRIS is a step in the right direction. The Early Learning Advisory Council would like to commend the State of New Mexico for taking initial steps to address these gaps.
- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health and the Children, Youth and Families Department 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.
- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health, the Children, Youth and Families Department and the Public Education Department that they meet with community stakeholders to increase their capacity to apply for funding and consider flexible funding models to meet the needs of the underserved and rural communities.

- ELAC recommends to Pyramid Framework Partnership that they promote awareness of resources available to New Mexico communities statewide.
- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health, the Children, Youth and Families Department and the Public Education Department that they coordinate efforts to expand investment in early childhood through state, federal and philanthropic opportunities. State funds should not supplant federal funding.
- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health, the Children, Youth and Families Department and the Public Education Department that they recognize the diverse opportunities children have been afforded, that they grow multiple pathways prior to entrance of kindergarten readiness and that all these pathways be considered appropriate based in best practice (also Priority Goal 2).
- ELAC recommends to the Department of Health that providers should encourage parents to share developmental screening information with other providers of support services that could be or should be engaged.
- ELAC recommends to the Public Education Department that an appointed member of ELAC should be added to the committee that monitors the data system of unique identifiers and the data included in the system.
- ELAC recommends to the Children, Youth and Families Department that state organizations representing Child Care stakeholders be included on the Children, Youth and Families Department State Plan addressing the Child Care Block grant.
- ELAC requests that the Children, Youth and Families Department present the Child Care State Plan for feedback to the Council prior to its submission to HHS.

- ELAC encourages the Children, Youth and Families Department to implement the twelve month contract called for in their Child Care Block grant reauthorization.

Priority Goal 2 Improve School Readiness (now and at 3rd grade): Recommendations

- ELAC recommends that the Children, Youth and Families Department and the Public Education Department support the development of School and Community Early Learning Councils to address the alignment of best practices for school readiness across programs to ensure that the needs of children and families are supported.
- ELAC recommends to the Children, Youth and Families Department, the Public Education Department and the Department of Health that they include professionals from across sectors to attend trainings that are interdisciplinary and that would address key indicators of school readiness and improve continuity.
- ELAC encourages the Children, Youth and Families Department and the Public Education Department to adopt the 2011 definition of school readiness.
- ELAC encourages the Children, Youth and Families Department, the Public Education Department and the Department of Health to support the business community to develop a stronger awareness of the benefits of allowing parents to be part of their child's early childhood education.

Priority Goal 3 High Quality Early Childhood Workforce: Recommendations

- ELAC reminds the Children, Youth and Families Department, the Public Education Department and the Department of Health that workforce development is necessary in order for expansion to continue and that the workforce need must be addressed.

- ELAC recommends to the Legislative Finance Committee and the Governor of New Mexico that TEACH be expanded to support obtaining degrees and incentives to help with staff retention for quality and continuity of care.
- ELAC recommends to the Higher Education Taskforce the review of the quality of early childhood education provided by institutions of Higher Education to make sure that college education meets the needs of attending students.
- ELAC recommends to the Higher Education Taskforce and the Public Education Department that a system be developed to acknowledge and apply appropriate credit from prior learning experiences to current educational situations.

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 Childhood and recognize the huge strides taken toward supporting an Early Childhood system that meets 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.