



STATE OF MAINE
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF POLICY INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE
181 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0181

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Dear Members of the 130th Legislature,

We are pleased to share with you the two strategic plans of Governor Mills' Children's Cabinet, an update on the Children's Cabinet work in 2020, and a preview of some of the Cabinet's plans for 2021.

The Children's Cabinet members are the Commissioners of five state agencies—Department of Corrections, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Labor, and Department of Public Safety—operating programs and policies for children and youth. DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew serves as the Chair of the Children's Cabinet. The Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future coordinates the work of the Children's Cabinet.

High-level staff members from each of the agencies meet regularly to promote and support on-going cross-agency communication and collaboration for policy and program development among state agencies serving children, youth and families.

The two Children's Cabinet strategic plans lay out two overarching goals:

- All Maine children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.
- All Maine youth enter adulthood healthy, connected to the workforce and/or education.

Implementing strategies to support young children and their families:

The Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Early Learning Team at the Department of Education (DOE) are leading much of the effort to implement strategies to strengthen our early care and education system and services for young children. The Children's Cabinet focuses its efforts in three main areas: 1) increasing access to access to affordable early care & education, preventive and early intervention services; 2) raising the quality of our early care and education programs; and 3) recruiting, preparing and retaining a diverse early childhood workforce.

- On July 1, 2020 the Office of Child and Family Services implemented the following strategies to improve access to quality child care and education:
 - **Incentivize the expansion of infant care by implementing a new \$100 per week infant stipend through the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP).** To recognize the higher cost of providing infant care, all child care providers participating in Maine's quality rating improvement system (QRIS) receive \$100 per week stipend for every infant in their care receiving a child care subsidy.
 - **Encourage expansion of infant and toddler care and improved quality by implementing a 10% quality bump payment for providers caring for infants and toddlers participating in CCSP.** The level of the quality bump is based upon the quality rating of the child care provider.
 - **Offer quality improvement grants to support child care programs to improve their quality and/or retain their accreditation.** Child care programs can receive small grants to implement strategies to improve their quality as measured by the Quality Rating Improvement System.

- **Support individuals in the child care field to attain post-secondary degrees in Early Childhood Education through the T.E.A.C.H. program.** OCFS provided funding to Maine Association of the Education of Young Children to establish the T.E.A.C.H. program which offers scholarships and other supports to individuals working in the child care field to attain either bachelors or associates degree in early childhood education. This program is one strategy for helping to grow a qualified early care and education workforce.
- **In the fall of 2020, the Office of Child and Family Services also began implementation of a five-county pilot of the Early Childhood Consultation Program (ECCP) to support early childhood educators and parents struggling to address challenging behaviors in young children.** The ECCP partners early childhood mental health professionals and early childhood educators to increase their capacity to support children’s social, emotional and behavioral health so that they can develop, learn and succeed. The goal is for the ECCP consultants in all five counties (Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Kennebec and Penobscot) to be hired and trained by the end of January 2021. Support for the development of the ECCP pilot came from the passage of LD 997 in the 129th Maine Legislature.

In addition to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these initiatives in 2021, the Children’s Cabinet staff are planning for new initiatives to promote the healthy development of young children and continue efforts to expand access to quality child care:

- **The Early Learning Team at DOE is currently planning a series of professional learning opportunities for school administrators and early childhood educators including:**
 - A new inclusive cohort of early childhood educators from public schools and child care programs to participate in a professional learning program to support inclusive and trauma informed practices in early care and education settings.
 - Trainings for school administrators on early childhood education to support transitions and build connections between the early care and education systems and public schools.
- **To increase the rates of developmental screenings for young children to identify developmental delays and disabilities as early as possible, staff across DHHS will work with programs serving young children to move the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), a developmental screening tool, on-line for better coordination and access.**
- **In 2021, the Office of Child and Family Services will work to expand child care slots, particularly in rural areas, by providing start up grants to existing and new child care programs, both center-based and family child care programs.**

Implementing Strategies to Support Youth in their Transition to Adulthood:

Staff from the Office of Child and Family Services, the Center for Disease Control and the Commissioner’s Office at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the School Support and Services Team at the Department of Education (DOE), workforce development and training staff at the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Juvenile Services team at Department of Correction (DOC) are all involved in implementing the Children’s Cabinet strategies to strengthen programs and policies for youth. The Children’s Cabinet focuses its efforts in three main areas: 1) ensuring basic needs of youth and their families are met; 2) increasing prevention services and programming in schools and at the community level; and 3) increasing access to needed behavioral health services, including substance use disorder prevention, screening and treatment.

- **During the fall of 2020, the Division of School and Student Supports at DOE successfully implemented a new comprehensive social emotional learning Pre-K through grade 12 curriculum (known as SEL 4 ME) that is available on-line, free to all school districts, afterschool programs and others working directly with students in Maine.** The goal of SEL 4 ME is for all school districts and community programs across the state to have equal access to resources aimed at the development of social-emotional competences in order to create safe and supportive schools where all students can thrive, and know with certainty that they are safe, respected and valued regardless of race, sexual orientation or gender. Staff at DOE are providing regular SEL 4 ME trainings.
- **With funding from the Fund for Healthy Maine, the adolescent health team at the Center for Disease Control has implemented a series of initiatives to improve school environments for youth and improve behavioral health services for youth in the schools and in the community.** While the pandemic has hindered some of these efforts, the CDC and its partners have found ways to implement these strategies which include:
 - Supporting school-based health centers to provide additional hours for mental and behavioral health services to students.
 - Funding Maine Youth Advocates Network to provide restorative practices support, education & technical assistance in schools.
 - Increasing training and technical assistance for behavioral health organizations on effective screening and identification of suicide prevention for youth with substance use disorders.
 - Expanding implementation of the Zero Suicide Model among health care providers, FQHCs, and behavioral health organizations.
- **The Office of Child and Family Services has taken several steps to expand evidence-based behavioral health services for youth.**
 - In the summer of 2020, OCFS funded a contract with a nationally certified Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) trainer who is providing training at no cost to 125 clinicians for them to become nationally certified. TF-CBT is widely recognized as an effective evidence-based treatment modality.
 - OCFS has initiated a pilot project in Aroostook County that aims to improve the system of crisis care for youth in Maine. The pilot provides aftercare and stabilization services for both youth and their family members following discharge from emergency departments, psychiatric hospitals, crisis stabilization, and/or residential treatment. The aftercare services are focused on helping the youth and their family understand the treatment recommendations and access necessary services within their community.

In 2021, the Children’s Cabinet staff will continue to build upon these initiatives and expand new initiatives with grant funds, evaluate the impact of these initiatives on youth and plan for implementation of some of the Cabinet’s medium-term strategies:

- **With the support of grant funding, OCFS in 2021 will continue its work to expand evidence-based behavioral health services for youth:**
 - The Office of Child and Family Services has been awarded a four-year, \$8.5 million Systems of Care grant from the federal government to improve behavioral health services available for children and youth in their homes and communities. The Systems of Care team at OCFS will focus on addressing systemic issues that affect access to behavioral health services, particularly in rural communities, including coordinating children's clinical care across providers, engaging families in available services, supporting data-informed decision making, increasing access to evidence-based practices and improving service quality.

- The Children's Cabinet secured a grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation to fund a one-year position at OCFS to focus on expanding evidence-based substance use treatment for youth across the state. This position will work closely with the Systems of Care team at OCFS to coordinate efforts to reach more youth with necessary services to keep them healthy, stable and connected to their families and communities.
- **The Children's Cabinet staff will continue to work on efforts to increase opportunities for youth to participate in paid work experience, work-based learning or internships.** Participation in paid work prior to graduating from high school is a strong indicator of future success.
 - Staff from the Maine Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Program are collaborating with DOE, the Maine Community College System, businesses and other stakeholders to develop pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programming for youth. Youth apprenticeship is a structured work-based learning program that connects educational need of youth with talent needs of industry.
 - A cross-agency working group will work to better understand existing opportunities for youth to participate in paid work and identify opportunities for new programming.

Response to COVID-19:

2020 has been an incredibly tough year for many children, youth and families across our state. Staff at state agencies, medical offices, community based and social services organizations, local schools and child care programs are all working overtime to meet the needs of children, youth and families. Staff participating in the Children's Cabinet have been deeply involved in efforts to: simplify and streamline access to needed assistance for struggling families; support teachers and schools to adapt to remote learning, to support the social emotional needs of children during the pandemic and to protect the health and safety of children and staff; and to support children and youth to access needed health care services, including well-child visits and routine immunizations.

As the economy began to re-open in the late Spring and early summer, the Office of Child and Family Services provided three rounds of grants with federal funding to support the stabilization and re-opening of child care programs. With funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Department of Education provided grants to 42 school districts for the fall of 2020 to support schools to offer programming for children who needed care during the time in which they were participating in remote learning as a result of hybrid learning schedules.

The Children's Cabinet work will continue to be impacted by COVID-19 and the need to respond to the needs of children, youth and families. We are pleased, however, that we have been able to continue to make significant progress in implementing many of our identified strategies and look forward to building on and expanding our work in 2021.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions about the work of the Children's Cabinet. I can be reached at ana.hicks@maine.gov.

Sincerely,



Ana Hicks
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Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future

Children’s Cabinet Plan for Young Children:

All Maine Children Enter Kindergarten Prepared to Succeed

The Children’s Cabinet will implement key strategies to promote the healthy development of all young children in Maine and ensure that all children grow up in healthy, safe and supportive environments. The Cabinet will strive to engage the voice of parents in a culturally and linguistically accessible way as we further develop and implement our strategies.

Areas of Focus

- The Children’s Cabinet will implement strategies that will:
1. Increase access to affordable early care & education, preventive and early intervention services for young children and their families.
 2. Raise the quality of our early care and education system and support families to access quality programming.
 3. Recruit, prepare and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

Children’s Cabinet Strategies

Short term strategies: 2020 - 2021

- Provide start-up mini-grants to existing or new child care programs to create new slots, particularly in rural areas.
- Offer weekly stipends of \$100 to infant caregivers receiving CCSP to recognize the high cost of providing infant care.
- Increase the quality bump to child care programs on the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) serving infants and toddlers.
- Provide scholarships to help students with low and moderate income attain associates and bachelor’s degrees in early childhood education.
- Provide min-grants to child care programs to improve quality and rating on the QRIS.
- Expand professional learning opportunities that support inclusive and trauma informed practices in early care and education (ECE) settings.
- Build the infrastructure for an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).

Intermediate strategies: 2020 – 2023

- Streamline, simplify and raise awareness about the eligibility process for the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP).
- Implement the early childhood mental health consultation pilot sites to help parents and educators support the social and emotional development of young children, particularly children with special needs.
- Revise the QRIS system to be a five-star system to bring all licensed child care programs into the state’s quality rating system.
- Support families to navigate Child Find, Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment in MaineCare, and Child Development Services to ensure children receive necessary health and intervention services.
- Ensure that substance use screening, treatment and support for recovery is available for pregnant mothers through infancy.
- Offer a professional learning series on early childhood education to school administrators, particularly for those with ECE programs.

Long-term strategies: 2020 – 2025

- Expand public pre-K for 4 year olds and fund start-up grants to incentivize partnerships between schools, Head Start and child care programs.
- Expand the early childhood mental health consultation program statewide.
- Support opportunities and strategies for increasing wages for early childhood educators.
- Increase access to, expand and strengthen early childhood programming at Career and Technical schools.
- Ensure no wrong door for families to access services, such as SNAP, MaineCare and WIC, and establish a centralized entity around developmental screening and care coordination for early intervention services.
- Ensure access to and utilization of high-quality preventive services for young children and their families.
- Increase professional development and coaching opportunities for early educators in center-based and family child care programs.
- Establish an Early Childhood Integrated Data System to track progress on early childhood goals and to analyze impact of policy decisions.

Children’s Cabinet Plan for Maine Youth:

All Maine Youth Enter Adulthood Healthy, Connected to the Workforce and/or Education

The Children’s Cabinet’s strategies will promote inclusion and equity and consider the cultural, social, economic and linguistic needs of Maine’s diverse population of youth aged 14 to 24 and their families. The Cabinet will engage and collaborate with youth to inform and strengthen our work as a Cabinet.

Areas of Focus

Children’s Cabinet Strategies

Short term strategies: 2020 - 2021

- Train 5 cohorts of Maine therapists (for a total of 125) in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.
- Strengthen children’s crisis services to keep youth with their families, starting with a demonstration project in Aroostook County.
- Disseminate a universally accessible and free Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum for all schools & after school programs.
- Support school-based health centers to provide additional hours for mental and behavioral health services to students.
- Fund Maine Youth Advocates Network to provide restorative practices support, education & technical assistance in schools.
- Increase training and technical assistance for behavioral health organizations on effective screening and identification of suicide prevention for youth living with a substance use disorder.
- Expand implementation of the Zero Suicide Model among health care providers, FQHCs, and behavioral health organizations.

Intermediate strategies: 2020 – 2023

- Improve and align behavioral health screenings across state agencies to ensure early identification and referral to services.
- Increase access for youth to evidence-based behavioral health services, including prevention and early intervention.
- Establish a training program for school support staff members to recognize and mitigate the impact of trauma.
- Align and increase the incorporation of restorative practices and restorative justice across state programs for youth.
- Increase programming to support pregnant and parenting teens.
- Provide more opportunities for youth to participate in paid internships or paid work.
- Increase awareness of careers, career pathways and access points to post-secondary education and training programs.

Long-term strategies: 2020 – 2025

- Expand housing options across the continuum of care and entire state.
- Increase access to youth substance use disorder treatment in primary care practices and school-based health centers.
- Ensure eligible youth and young adults are participating in public programs to increase food security and health coverage.
- Strengthen continuum of children’s crisis services.
- Ensure successful and smooth transitions for youth moving from children to adult service systems.
- Ensure systems involved youth can access the services that they need in their communities.

The Children’s Cabinet will implement strategies that will:

1. Ensure basic needs of youth and their families are met.
2. Increase prevention services and programming in schools and at the community level.
3. Increase access to needed behavioral health, including substance use disorder, screenings and treatment.