

# 2021 MAINE CHILDREN'S CABINET REPORT



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF  
**Policy Innovation and the Future**



**“There is no higher priority than our children and. . .it is high time we put children’s health and safety first. I will start with one simple step — calling together the Children’s Cabinet for the first time in years, to tackle these issues.”**

**—Governor Janet T. Mills,  
Inaugural Address**

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

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After Governor Mills took office in 2019, one of her first actions was to revitalize the Children's Cabinet to support the care and education of our youngest children and elevate the lives of young people to offer them a better, brighter future.

Quality, affordable early child care and education is critical to the healthy development of young children and to the long-term growth of our communities and economy. This work, like so much, has been deeply challenged by the pandemic. Throughout it all, the Children's Cabinet has worked hard to direct the resources of State government to help Maine children through these difficult times.

This year, with the significant and historic support from the American Rescue Plan Act, the Children's Cabinet helped create the Child Care Plan for Maine, which is delivering approximately \$120 million in grants to help child care providers recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, keep valued caregivers employed, and improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of child care for Maine families.

These investments build on the Mills Administration's efforts to support Maine children and families before and during the pandemic, including helping low-income parents who receive subsidies by waiving their contribution to child care fees, distributing \$10 million in federal CARES Act funding directly to providers through stipends and grants, and making available \$8.4 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds to reimburse providers for COVID-19-related business costs.

The State is making further investments in child care infrastructure through the Governor Mills' Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan, with a \$20 million investment to help communities renovate, expand, or build new child care facilities and expand early childhood pre-K education programs.

This fall, 14 school districts will create or expand Pre-Kindergarten opportunities for more than 500 four-year-old students, which will vastly improve their chances for long-term educational and social success. Grants to even more districts to start or expand Pre-K programs in 2023 are coming this summer.

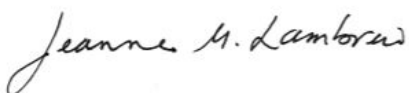
For students preparing to leave school, the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan is expanding job training offerings at Maine's colleges and universities, encouraging new apprenticeship programs in fast-growing fields, and investing in internships and career exploration to give students the chance to experience a variety of opportunities to help choose a future path.

In addition, the Children's Cabinet has expanded programs that equip early childhood educators with more skills to help children with behavioral or emotional challenges, and brought forward a successful pilot project in northern Maine to help youth experiencing crisis stay safely at home with their families.

While proud of these accomplishments, we recognize there's more work ahead to make child care and early childhood education more available and accessible, especially in rural areas, and further expand opportunities to prepare Maine students for success after leaving high school.

In the coming year, the Children's Cabinet will continue to address these challenges by protecting the health and well-being of our youngest children and offering our young adults new and vibrant post-school possibilities that lead to lifelong careers and fulfilling, meaningful lives.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Lambrew  
Commissioner, Department of Health and Human Services Chair,  
Maine Children's Cabinet

# 2021 CHILDREN'S CABINET REPORT

## About Governor Mills' Children's Cabinet

In her inaugural address in 2019, Governor Mills announced that she would reinstate the Children's Cabinet after an eight-year hiatus. The Children's Cabinet plays a vital role in convening and facilitating coordination across state agencies on initiatives and policies that improve and promote the healthy development of children and youth in Maine. The 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.

Maine Children's Cabinet members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections. Currently, Department of Health

and Human Services (DHHS) Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew serves as chair of the Children's Cabinet. The Children's Cabinet is coordinated by staff from the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) with support from key staff from each participating agency.

Staff from the Departments comprising the Children's Cabinet meet regularly to communicate changes and developments in programming and policies across state agencies for children and youth, coordinate the implementation of specific strategies, and identify new opportunities to collaborate across programs to advance the Children's Cabinet's strategies and goals.

## Children's Cabinet Achievements in 2021

In 2021, the Children's Cabinet made significant progress in implementing many of the strategies laid out in the Children's Cabinet plan for Young Children



(see Appendix A) and the Children’s Cabinet Plan for Youth (see Appendix B). The impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic remained a focus for the staff participating in the Children’s Cabinet and continued to put a strain on families as well as agencies and partners that serve them. It also offered unexpected opportunities, including funding from the various coronavirus relief laws, that have helped accelerate progress in certain areas.

This report outlines the initiatives for young children and youth that moved forward in 2021 and highlights plans for continued implementation of the Children’s Cabinet strategies in 2022.

A few key highlights of the 2021 achievements of the state agencies participating in the work of the Children’s Cabinet include:

- Distributed \$22 million in quarterly grants through 2021 and began to distribute monthly grants to stabilize and support child care programs facing financial challenges and increased costs as a result of the pandemic. The monthly Child Care Stabilization grants, administered by the Office of Child and Family Services, will total an additional \$73 million investment in the child care industry and are providing monthly grants to 85% of all licensed child care programs including a \$200 monthly stipend for staff working directly with children. These grants represent significant, historic investments to stabilize and support the child care industry.
- Expanded to the Early Childhood Consultation Program, an infant and early childhood mental health consultation program, to eight Maine counties. The program provides tools to early childhood educators to address challenging behaviors or social emotional concerns among children in their classroom. From January of 2021 through December 14, 2021, the ECCP® program served 508 children with core classroom services and 32 children with child-specific services. Over 230 child care provider staff attended trainings in this time period.
- Awarded a first-round of pre-K expansion grants to 14 School Administrative Units to expand public pre-K in the fall of 2022. The federal funds

committed through the Governor’s Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan will make new pre-K programs available to an additional 365 children in Maine, and an additional 160 current part-time slots will increase to either full-day or full-week. A second round of grants for the 2023 school year will awarded later in 2022.

- Piloted a successful Crisis Aftercare Program in Aroostook and Washington Counties providing aftercare and stabilization services to 114 families to support youth to safely remain in their homes with their families following a crisis including after discharge from emergency departments, psychiatric hospitals, crisis stabilization, and/or residential treatment. The pilot successfully supported 90% of the youth to stay home and avoid the need for institutional care. With the support of federal funding the program was expanded statewide in July 2021.
- Further built out the free and accessible social emotional learning series with 450 on-line modules to support schools to create positive, supportive environments and meet the social emotional needs of our students, which has proven to be particularly important as students struggle with the on-going impacts of the pandemic on their overall health and well-being. In 2021, there were more than 70,000 SEL4ME curriculum engagements and more than 8,700 registered student users of the curriculums.

More detail about these initiatives and the other initiatives supported by the Children’s Cabinet and staff from state agencies participating in the Children’s Cabinet are provided in this report.



# STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN TO ENTER KINDERGARTEN PREPARED TO SUCCEED

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In 2021, the Children’s Cabinet continued to implement the strategies in its plan for young children, building upon accomplishments in 2020. The plan for young children was developed in the fall of 2019, guided by the findings of the comprehensive needs assessment conducted by the Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services as part of the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Birth through Five planning grant from the federal government. Through conversations with parents, child care providers, social service agency representatives, and others, the assessment identified a series of priority needs.

The review of the needs assessment and discussions across State agencies throughout the fall of 2019 led the Children’s Cabinet to focus its strategies in three main areas: 1) increasing access to affordable early care and 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.

## **Strengthening Maine’s Early Childhood Education System**

Through the work of the Children’s Cabinet, staff from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education (DOE) are coordinating efforts to increase access to quality and affordable early childhood education programs through a mixed delivery birth through five system.

The Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) at DHHS plays the key role in providing services to support families and their children in accessing quality early childhood education. OCFS oversees the administration of Maine’s Child Care Development Block Grant. This work includes managing the Maine’s Child Care Subsidy Program, Child Care Licensing and Investigation Services, Quality Rating and Improve-

ment System, and the state’s contract with the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ PDN). The Child Care Subsidy Program provides subsidies to help families with incomes up to 85% of the median income to pay for child care, including afterschool care. The MRTQ PDN promotes and supports professionalism in the field of early childhood education and improves quality through the provision of a statewide system of professional development.

Maine DOE’s Early Learning (EL) staff promote children’s learning by offering information and resources to support public preschool and Head Start teachers and administrators involved in educating Maine’s young learners. The EL staff provide guidance and tools to increase access to high-quality public preschool and Head Start; strengthen and align instruction, assessment, and curriculum to established standards; support the professional development of early childhood professionals in public preschools and Head Start; assist families in supporting their children’s learning; and inform policy, planning, and research-based practices.

In 2021, strategies implemented by these teams included strengthening the child care subsidy program, stabilizing Maine’s child care industry during the continued global pandemic, providing tools to support early childhood educators to meet the behavioral health needs of children, supporting the early childhood education workforce, expanding public Pre-K, and offering tools to early childhood educators and schools to support transitions from child care into public schools.

## **Strengthening Maine’s Child Care Subsidy Program to Improve Access to Affordable Care and Education**

The Office of Child and Family Services dedicated federal funding from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act and the American Rescue Plan Act to increase access to

affordable child care by strengthening the Child Care Subsidy Program.

These initiatives include:

- **Waiving parent copayments for the Child Care Subsidy Program:** With federal funding, OCFS has waived all copayments for families participating in the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP). CCSP helps parents who are working or participating in education or training pay for child care. Families with incomes up to 85% of the state median income (which is an annual salary of \$64,379 for a family of 3) are eligible for assistance from CCSP. Without the co-payment waiver, families are expected to pay up to 10% of their income towards their child care expenses. The copayment waiver will stay in place for all families until July 1, 2022 and for families with incomes below 60% of the median income until September 30, 2024.

In August 2021, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) conducted a survey of participating families to measure the impact of the waived copays. Parents reported that the fee waivers not only improved the affordability of child care but also allowed them to continue to work or go back to work, explore educational opportunities, and achieve better financial security:

- Parents reported spending the money they saved on basic necessities for their families, including rent and mortgage payments, healthy food, and clothing;
  - 74% of parents reported being able to continue working or return to work and 15% were able to attend or return to school;
  - 98% of parents reported that they were currently working; and
  - 93% of parents reported their children were in their ideal child care arrangement.
- **Providing 35% increase in reimbursement rates for child care programs participating in CCSP and serving children with special needs.** OCFS is committed to encouraging inclusive policies and practices that support child care programs to serve children with special needs.

- **Reimbursing based on enrollment instead of attendance.** CCSP typically reimburses child care programs for the days that a child attends a program. With greater absences as a result of illness and unexpected quarantines from the pandemic, reimbursing based on enrollment provides child care programs accepting CCSP greater stability and prevents strain from the current pandemic. CCSP will reimburse based on enrollment until September 30, 2024.

- **Translating CCSP materials in multiple languages.** OCFS is committed to continually improving access to the Child Care Subsidy Program. In 2021, OCFS used funding from the American Rescue Plan to translate the eligibility guidelines and the application into multiple languages, including Arabic, Kinyarwanda, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili, and Lingala. OCFS is currently funding the translation of the Child Care Rules for Providers into multiple languages to support programs operated by New Mainers.

#### **Child Care Stabilization Grants Support Child Care Industry**

Grants from the Office of Child and Family Service, funded with federal Coronavirus Relief Funds, have played a critical role in supporting Maine’s child care industry throughout the pandemic and have spurred policy innovations.

In March 2020, a little more than half of Maine’s child care programs closed temporarily following the state public health orders. The other half stayed open to care





for the children of essential workers. Grants from the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), funded through the CARES Act, enabled those child care programs to stay open and the rest to re-open by late spring and summer 2020. Most programs were running again by the fall of 2020 and a few more opened or reopened during 2021.

With the federal funds from the CARES Act, OCFS implemented a series of short-term policy changes to support families to maintain or receive assistance with paying for child care and provided a series of grants to assist child care programs facing significant fiscal challenges due to losses in revenue and increased costs as a result of the pandemic.

In 2021, with support from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act and the

American Rescue Plan, the Office of Child and Family Services has been able to provide additional grants to child care programs. Throughout 2021, OCFS provided quarterly grants to child care programs, totaling more than \$22 million.

In addition to the quarterly grants, the Office of Child and Family Services is now providing monthly stabilization grants to child care programs to support and stabilize the industry with funding from the American Rescue Plan. Maine was one of the first states to make this stabilization funding available to all licensed child care programs. The first round of grants was released starting in October 2021 and will be provided monthly through September 2022. Committed to encouraging as many programs as possible to apply, OCFS developed a one page, simple application; advertised the program through regular emails and other communications;



and called every licensed child care program that had not signed up for the grant by the end of September to provide basic information about the grants, answer any questions, and address concerns about the grant. As of December 13, 2021, 85% of all licensed child care programs are receiving the monthly grants which provide programs with \$100 per licensed slot, \$200 per month stipends for staff working directly with children, and payments based upon a program's quality rating and acceptance of the Child Care Subsidy Program. These grants will total \$73 million, a significant and historic investment to stabilize and support the child care industry.

### **Investing in Maine's Early Childhood Education Workforce**

Stipends for Maine's early childhood education workforce is a key component of Maine's child care stabilization grants and aligns with the Children's Cabinet goal to recruit, prepare, and retain a diverse early childhood education workforce. Licensed child care programs receiving monthly grants are required to pass through a \$200 monthly stipend to all early childhood educators and staff working directly children. As of December 13, 2021, nearly 6,500 staff in licensed child care programs are receiving the \$200 monthly stipend. Most child care programs are either providing this stipend in their employees' paychecks or providing employees with a monthly \$200 check. This stipend will continue through the duration of the grant period: from October 2021 through September 2022.

The 2019 Preschool Development Grant Needs Assessment identified low pay as a primary barrier to recruiting and retaining staff. In 2020, the average hourly wage of a Maine child care worker was \$14.31, one-third less than the state average wage. Many child care programs are apprehensive to raise fees more because parents already find that paying for child care is a strain on their budgets.

Additionally, in the first session of the 130<sup>th</sup> legislature, legislators and members of the administration discussed different options for addressing compensation for the early childhood education workforce

including a bill to pay wage supplements and a bill to provide refundable tax credits to individuals working in early childhood education. The implementation of the temporary monthly stipend offered by OCFS afforded policymakers time to further examine this issue. Over the summer and the fall, the Children's Cabinet coordinator, staff from OCFS, and other key stakeholders, with support from the national policy organization Zero to Three, researched policies and programs implemented in other states. The group also held a series of listening sessions with child care program directors and owners and early childhood educators to receive feedback on the issue of compensation for the early childhood education workforce and policy options. The group drafted a report that lays out the benefits and disadvantages of different policy options implemented by other states.

"My wife and I operate a child care center for 154 children with 35 employees. The \$200 per month stipend for our educators is probably the most important part of the Child Care Stabilization Grants. We need to recruit and retain individuals who want to care for and educate our youngest children to enter the field. The grants have allowed us to not only pay the required \$200 per month stipend to our educators, but also give them a \$1 per hour raise, an extra \$50 per month for full-time staff and \$25 per month for part-time staff. We are also able to provide a \$300 sign-on bonus for new employees. In addition, we have used the grants to help cover the increased costs to meet the COVID health and safety guidelines and improve the quality of our program."

—John Bagshaw,  
Little Day Care, Falmouth, ME

## **Implementation and Expansion of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program**

Stakeholders participating in the 2019 PDG needs assessment also identified the increased stress of working with children with high needs as a factor in staff retention. In 2021, OCFS continued to implement and expand the Maine Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP®) program to provide tools to early childhood educators to address the social-emotional needs of children in their programs. The original legislation provided funding for pilot sites in five counties (Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Kennebec, and Penobscot counties). With additional coronavirus relief funds, OCFS expanded the pilot to eight counties, adding Hancock, Washington, and York, ensuring the program served more child care programs and children during this challenging time.

The Maine Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP®) is an infant and early childhood mental health consultation program that addresses the social-emotional needs of children birth to age eight (0-8) by offering support, education, and consultation to the adults who provide education and care for them. ECCP® provides strategies, support, and training to improve the capacity of early childhood educators as they work with children who have challenging behaviors or social-emotional concerns. ECCP® also incorporates brief consultation to families of children referred for support through the child's early childhood education setting.

There are two main components of the service: child-specific services and core classroom services. Eight ECCP® consultants, who work for three behavioral health providers in Maine, are now providing services to licensed child care centers, licensed family child care programs, and public pre-K programs in the eight pilot counties.

From the start of implementation in early January of 2021 through December 14, 2021, the ECCP® program served 508 children with core classroom

services and 32 children with child-specific services. Over 230 child care provider staff attended trainings in this time period. None of the children who received child-specific services were suspended or expelled from their child care programs. As OCFS continues to work towards full implementation of ECCP®, an increase in the number of children, families, and providers served is expected.

OCFS is working closely with the Department of Education to expand programming to public schools for children in grades K-2 in early 2022 and to licensed afterschool programs in spring of 2022. A statewide cross-agency workgroup which includes staff from OCFS, Child Development Services, Maine Roads to Quality, the Center for Community Inclusion & Disability Studies, Department of Education and the ECCP model developers meet regularly to support the integration of ECCP® into the continuum of supports for early care and intervention.

There have been significant challenges to ECCP® implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including child care staff illness, quarantining of children and staff in child care settings, and staffing shortages contributing to service delays and an increased need for ECCP® consultants to focus attention on staff stress management and communication. Despite these challenges, consultants have been able to provide all services in-person with only temporary virtual adaptations as needed. OCFS is in the process of identifying a provider to conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of the ECCP® pilot, including relevant assessment of outcome data.

## **Supporting Smooth Transitions into Public School for Young Children**

The Children's Cabinet coordinator and staff from the Early Learning Team at the Maine Department of Education (DOE) and the Office of Child and Family Services participated in a project with the Education Commission for the States to develop a series of professional development learning modules for school administrators and teachers to improve the transition



for young children into public schools, particularly from pre-K or preschool into kindergarten. Starting public school can be a significant transition for children and families that can be filled with mixed emotions, worries, and many questions for families. Smoothing this transition for children can help them to adjust to the new setting and better prepare them to learn and succeed in school.

The transitions project included provision of a technical assistance provider to the cross agency team to assist with the development of the professional learning modules. Additionally, staff conducted focus groups with parents and early childhood educators to gather their input and ideas about how our public schools could be better supporting young children and their families during the transition into either public pre-k or kindergarten. The feedback from the parents and early childhood educators supported the expansion of materials on the DOE's website and was incorporated into the development of the professional development learning modules.

Materials to support school administrators and teachers to implement policies and programming to better support transitions will be available in written form as an on-line toolkit and through a series of asynchronous training modules. In 2022, DOE staff will engage and support teachers and administrators to understand and access these tools.

### **Increasing Knowledge of Early Childhood Development and Programming for School Administrators**

In the fall of 2021, the Early Learning Team in partnership with Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network, UMaine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, Maine Association for the Education of Young Children, and Maine Principals' Association kicked off the first pilot of the Leading Early Learning professional learning series, which is geared toward elementary principals who work in the PK – 3 span. The series is designed to build understanding of the components of evidence-based, high-quality early childhood (pre-K-3) learning environments and approaches that promote diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices, as well as provide a better understanding

of the early childhood care and education system. The series promotes best practices in early childhood education and leadership abilities to support children, teachers, and families during this pivotal time in children's development.

The pilot project has 18 participants from elementary schools across the state. Through this learning series, these participants are:

- Increasing the knowledge of early childhood development and pedagogy;
- Strengthening their early childhood leadership abilities within their school districts and communities;
- Identifying resources and key components of high-quality early childhood programming; and,
- Building a professional network to grow their understanding of early childhood.

The 40-hour series runs between October 2021 and May 2022 with the opportunity for further consultation with DOE staff in May and June 2022.

### **Expanding Public Pre-K to More Four Year Olds In Maine**

The Children's Cabinet is committed to expanding public pre-K for four-year olds in Maine, an important component of a mixed delivery system for early childhood care and education for children from birth through age five. Provision of high-quality public pre-K has been extensively documented in research as an effective intervention for promoting whole child development and for attributing to long-term positive impacts. A 2019 synthesis of the research by the [Learning Policy Institute](#) on the impacts of pre-K found that investments in early childhood education bolster student success and have positive impacts on children's early literacy, math, and, social-emotional skills. The Early Learning Team at the Department of Education took critical steps in 2021 to support more School Administrative Units (SAUs) to offer public pre-K in 2022.

Over the last decade, the state has greatly expanded the number of SAUs providing public pre-K to four-year olds—nearly 80% of Maine's SAUs offer it now. Prior to the pandemic in 2019, almost half of all four-year olds were enrolled in a pre-K program and that number had been increasing.

As a result of the pandemic, public pre-K enrollments declined from 6,023 students in the 2019-2020 school year to 4,746 students during the 2020-2021 school year, when many schools were operating on a hybrid schedule with a mix of in-person and virtual school days. Fortunately, enrollment in public pre-K bounced back up to 5,548 students in the fall of 2021, although not yet to pre-pandemic levels.

Many schools face barriers, such as staffing and space for new classrooms, that are preventing them from implementing or expanding public pre-K classrooms. The Governor included \$10 million in her Maine Jobs and Recovery plan to support the expansion of public pre-K. The Early Learning Team at the Department of Education released a Request for Applications in September 2021 to fund initial startup costs to help schools overcome barriers to expanding the number of pre-K slots or expanding programming from part-time to full-day, full-week programming. Research shows that full-day/full-week programming has greater benefits for children including higher scores in school readiness, greater school attendance, and reduced chronic





absences. Children in full-day/full-week programming have fewer transitions throughout the day and this better meets the needs of working parents who are juggling work and care for their children.

In December 2021, the Early Learning Team at DOE notified 14 SAUs that they had been awarded grants to build out new programming for the fall of 2022. The American Rescue Plan funding committed through this grant program will increase the number of 4-year olds able to attend public pre-K by 365. Additionally, within the 14 SAUs awarded grants, 160 part-day/part-week slots will increase to full day/full week slots. Of the awarded applicants, five are brand new programs, four are expansions of part day/part week programming to full day/full week, four are full day/full week programs adding more classrooms, and one is a reestablished program. Additionally, 6 of the approved programs will operate in partnership with Head Starts or other community providers.

The Early Learning Team will provide technical assistance to awardees to implement their plans in school year 2022-23 and will release a second Request for Applications during the summer of 2022.

### **Encouraging Schools to Establish Public Pre-K Partnerships**

Maine has a history of successful public pre-K partnerships, particularly between public schools and Head Start programs, that can serve as models for further expansion. Of the 156 school districts offering public pre-K, 54 (34.6%) operate with a community partner. Expanding partnerships between public pre-K, child care programs (both center- and home-based programs) and/or Head Start programs will:

- Support the expansion of pre-K in communities where schools do not have the capacity to start new programs;
- Provide more options for working parents who need full-day, full-week care; and

- Support existing quality programming for young children through the blending and braiding of capacity and/or funding.

Over the summer of 2021, in anticipation of the release of the public pre-K grants, the Early Learning Team hosted a series of webinars about the benefits, barriers and basics of establishing local pre-K partnerships. Participants in the webinars learned about the requirements of the pre-K partnerships and heard from school administrators and Head Start and child care program directors about the benefits of these partnerships for families, students and the programs involved.

The Early Learning Team will continue to encourage and support School Administrative Units who are considering expanding public pre-K to do so in partnership with community programs.

### **Expanding Maine's Child Care Infrastructure Through Stipends and Grants**

Prior to the pandemic, a study by the Bipartisan Policy Center, in partnership with Maine's Office of Child and Family Policy, confirmed that Maine has a gap in formal licensed child care for working parents. While Maine's overall gap in child care was less than most other states, the analysis estimated that the number

of Maine children under six with all available parents working exceeded the number of licensed child care slots by 4,920 (9.2%), with a higher gap in Maine's rural areas.

Recognizing the need to increase access to quality child care, Governor Mills' Jobs and Recovery Plan includes \$10 million for grants to renovate, expand, or construct child care facilities and increase the availability and quality of child care. When developing the state's 10-Year Economic Development Strategy, the Governor traveled the state speaking to employers about their needs. Access to child care for their employees was often towards the top of their lists.

The pandemic has exacerbated this problem for families in Maine. While most programs have remained open or re-opened during the pandemic, there has been a decline in the number of licensed slots. The number of licensed child care slots declined from 45,655 in 2019 to 40,966 in 2020. More programs opened or re-opened in 2021 leading to an increase in licensed child care slots to 42,549 slots. However, overall Maine experienced a 7% decline in licensed slots since December 2019.



Governor Mills' Jobs and Recovery Plan grants will help to address both the child care gap and the decline in licensed slots by providing funding to programs, both center- and home-based programs, to cover "bricks and mortar" costs to expand the number of child care slots throughout the state. The grant will prioritize the expansion of slots for infants and toddlers and in underserved areas such as the rural parts of the state. Requests for applications is expected to be released in spring of 2022.

In addition to these larger grants to support "bricks and mortar" projects, OCFS is using increased federal funding through the American Rescue Plan to offer \$2,000 stipends to newly established Family Child Care programs to cover smaller initial startup costs. These grants have supported 25 of the newly opened Family Child Care Programs since it started in 2021.

## **Integrating and Aligning Programs and Services for Young Children**

### **The Children's Cabinet Early Intervention Workgroup Focused on Integrating and Aligning Programs and Services for Children from Birth through Age Five**

The Children's Cabinet Early Intervention Workgroup, which began meeting in the spring of 2020, comprises staff from the Maternal and Child Health Division at the Maine CDC, the Office of Child and Family Services, the Early Learning Team at DOE, Child Development Services, Office of Maine Care Services, and the DHHS Commissioner's Office.

The Early Intervention Workgroup provides an opportunity for staff managing early intervention policies and programs for young children to coordinate and collaborate efforts to better serve families with young children and ensure that young children receive necessary screenings, evaluations, and services to support their healthy development. In 2021, the Early Intervention Workgroup identified three initiatives that it will support to meet its goal of integrating and aligning maternal and early childhood programs and services. The team will support efforts to implement the Early

Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant recently awarded to the Maternal and Child Health Division at the Maine CDC, expand developmental screenings through the implementation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire online, and support families to better understand and access existing programs through the implementation of the national Help Me Grow model in Maine.

### **Increase Developmental Screening Rates to Connect Young Children to Needed Health and Educational Services**

Maine DHHS is working with the Children's Cabinet and the Cabinet's Early Intervention Workgroup to implement the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) online system to improve access to developmental screening for organizations working with children under the age of 5. Greater developmental screening rates are an important Children's Cabinet goal because they help pediatricians and other professionals working with children to identify developmental delays and disabilities. The earlier delays are recognized, the earlier needed intervention and/or health care services can be provided.

The system will allow programs and families to do developmental (ASQ) and social-emotional screening (ASQ-SE) using validated tools either online or by paper and then entering the information online so that screening data can be tracked. Having access to online developmental screening options has become more critical with COVID-19 and the increase in virtual service delivery.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends developmental screenings at 9, 18, and 30 months. The ASQ toolkit has screenings available starting at 2 months up to 60 months. The ASQ-SE social-emotional screener is the second tool that will be available through the online system and has screening tools from 1 month to 72 months.

Providing access to the ASQ online for more health care providers, Early Head Start and Head Start providers, child care providers, public health nursing,

and other professionals working with young children will improve coordination among professionals and allow for greater access to developmental screenings.

Programs participating in the initial roll out of online developmental screenings through ASQ will be provided the tools and training to work with families to complete the screenings. Staff will be trained on how to use the ASQ online and provide appropriate referrals to health care providers and services.

This project will be aligned with the roll out of Help Me Grow.

### **Helping Families Understand and Access Needed Programs and Services Through Implementation of Help Me Grow**

The 2019 PDG needs assessment highlights parents' struggles to navigate and access early childhood programs and services. A group of internal and external stakeholders working in 2015 and 2016 to expand developmental screenings statewide identified Help Me Grow as a potential tool for the state to improve access to existing resources and services for expectant parents and families with children through age eight. For a variety of reasons, efforts to implement Help Me Grow stalled. However, in 2021, the legislature passed LD 1712 which empowers the Department of Health and Human Services to implement Help Me Grow. Help Me Grow will be housed within the Office of Child and Family Services.

Help Me Grow (HMG) is a care coordination model currently used in 28 states that utilizes and builds on existing resources to develop and enhance a comprehensive approach to early childhood system-building. Help Me Grow promotes the healthy development of children by supporting families, providers, and communities by implementing four key components:

1. Centralized telephone access point for connection of children and their families to services and care coordination;

2. Community and family outreach to promote the use of HMG and to provide networking opportunities among families and service providers (child care providers, community providers);
3. Child health provider (medical providers) outreach to support early detection and early intervention; and
4. Data collection and analysis to understand all aspects of the HMG system, including the identification of gaps and barriers (HMG has been collecting evaluation data across states).

The Office of Child and Family Services is working with the Children's Cabinet Early Intervention Workgroup to implement Help Me Grow by the summer of 2022.

### **Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant to Support Better Integration and Coordination of Maine's Prenatal to Age 3 System**

In August 2021, the Maine CDC was awarded a five-year Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant from the US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Maine's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Health Integration P-3 Program will increase statewide access to integrated, effective, culturally appropriate, evidence-based early intervention practices and services during the prenatal and early childhood period.





Through the ECCS Health Integration P-3 program, Maine will:

- Provide a state-level central point of coordination, a new ECCS program manager, to connect Maine’s various maternal and early childhood programs and initiatives and, develop and expand partnerships to advance Maine’s vision for a comprehensive P-3 system.
- Develop a realistic state-level Early Childhood Strategic Plan which identifies the resources necessary and available to implement strategies and meet goals and objectives.
- Strengthen Maine’s perinatal system of care and integrate programs and services across the maternal and early childhood system.
- Support the establishment of Help Me Grow to ensure “no wrong door” P-3 care coordination for Maine to strengthen and improve linkages across the maternal and early childhood system.
- Convene state-level education and early childhood leaders and stakeholders to identify resources needed to sustain and advance ECCS priorities and programs.
- Develop targeted strategies to address health disparities based on geographic region, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Efforts to implement the above strategies will ramp up in early 2022 with the Maine CDC staff working closely with the Early Intervention Workgroup and external stakeholders. Integrating Maine’s systems of programs and services for pregnant individuals and families with young children will help families navigate Maine’s complex health and early childhood development system and increase referrals to and utilization of these critical services.

### **Building an Early Childhood Integrated Data System to Inform Decision-making**

In 2021, the Children’s Cabinet staff worked with national experts to develop a road map for the implementation of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System for Maine. An Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) “collects, integrates, maintains, stores, and reports information from early childhood



programs across multiple agencies within a state that serve children and families from birth to age eight.” Building an ECIDS provides state systems with data-driven insights to enhance program quality, inform policy and decision-making, and ultimately improve outcomes for children and families. An ECIDS can help Maine target resources serving children and families birth to age five to better serve vulnerable young children and their families by coordinating and aligning services, reducing duplication, and ensuring continuity of services.

With funding from the American Rescue Plan, the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future hired an Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems (ECIDS) Policy Coordinator who will be responsible for planning, organizing, and managing the implementation of an ECIDS. In 2022, the ECIDS Policy Coordinator will focus on developing the purpose and vision for an ECIDS in Maine; conducting data matches across early childhood programs to answer key policy questions and inform the development of an integrated data system; and coordinate and leverage existing data integration efforts such as the State Longitudinal Data System.

# STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT YOUTH TO ENTER ADULTHOOD HEALTHY, CONNECTED TO THE WORKFORCE AND/OR EDUCATION

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## Increasing Access to Evidence-based Behavioral Health Services for Youth

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), Children's Behavioral Health Services (CBHS) division focuses on behavioral health treatment and services for children from birth up to their 21st birthday. It has partnered with the Children's Cabinet and other stakeholders to expand evidence-based behavioral health services for youth, including substance use disorder services and treatment.

## Improving Outcomes for Youth

In 2021, OCFS continued the Improving Outcomes for Youth (IOY) contracts in three regions of the state. IOY providers deliver an evidence-based, evidence-informed, or promising-practice model service in each county of the identified region, to improve employment, independence, stability, health and wellbeing, and quality, permanent connections of youth and families.

Region 1 is with My Place Teen Center. Region 2 is with ME Alliance Boys and Girls Clubs. Region 3 is with Aroostook County Action Program.

IOY services aim to:

- Ensure the basic needs of youth and their families are met
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies
- Increase prevention services and programming in schools at the community level
- Increase access to needed behavioral health services, including substance use disorder screenings and treatment.

The initial numbers of youth participating were lower than anticipated for the 2021 state fiscal year due to the

pandemic, but all three programs continue community outreach. A mid-January meeting is scheduled between OCFS and the three providers to collaborate and discuss each programs' strengths, successes, and opportunities to address barriers in 2022.

## Implementing Crisis Aftercare Services to Keep Children and Youth in Their Homes During and Following a Behavioral Health Crisis

Starting in August 2020 and running through June 2021, OCFS implemented a pilot program providing Crisis Aftercare to 108 families in Aroostook County and 6 families in Washington County. The goal of the project was to support children and youth so they could remain safely in their homes and reduce hours spent in emergency departments during a behavioral health crisis. The pilot provided aftercare and stabilization services for both youth and their family members following a crisis including after discharge from emergency departments, psychiatric hospitals, crisis stabilization, and/or residential treatment. The aftercare services provided to families included clinical treatment, teaching coping skills, helping with family conflict resolution, offering crisis response services, and teaching de-escalation techniques to the entire family.

Data from that pilot indicated that aftercare services helped to reduce the need of children and families to access emergency departments and instead allowed families to safely maintain their children at home. For example, the pilot in Aroostook County (District 8) saw the following results:

- **88% of families served by the pilot did not go to the ER for crisis** once the team was involved.
- **The average number of children waiting in the ER dropped** dramatically following the implementation of the Crisis Aftercare pilot. District 8 had an average of 3 children waiting in the ER over ten hours once the service was

implemented, down from an average of 10 children before August 2020. (Important to note: Nationally, hospitals have seen a 31% increase in 12- to 17-year-old kids seeking help for their mental health, and a 24% increase for kids ages 5 to 11.)

- **90% of youth served by the pilot were able to remain at home due to the service supporting the family.** 10% of the youth involved went to Crisis Stabilization Unit, Inpatient Psychiatric Unit, or Residential Care.
- Most children experienced **marked improvement in functioning** because of the service.

With Coronavirus Relief Funds, OCFS expanded the Crisis Aftercare services statewide on July 1, 2021. Contracted mobile crisis stabilization providers deliver Crisis Aftercare services with a special focus on emergency departments and efforts to support children and families in a manner where children can remain safely in their home. OCFS has also worked over the last year to make the crisis providers' contracts more flexible, allowing for reimbursement for previously non-reimbursable expenses incurred in the provision of this service. This flexibility will allow providers to be reimbursed for their crisis intervention work with children when it does not result in a face-to-face assessment, travel to work with children and youth who live in rural areas and better ensure that children and youth are able to access the service regardless of where they reside.



In 2022, the Office of Child and Family Services will build upon this work to improve the crisis system of care with funding from a federal grant that the state received to support the development of community-based mobile crisis intervention services for both adults and youth on MaineCare. The grant period began on September 30, 2021, and Maine is in the early stages of planning for implementation. Based on the goals of the program OCFS anticipates that it will result in real and sustained improvements within the crisis system of care.

In all of its work related to crisis services, OCFS is seeking to partner with stakeholders, including crisis providers, hospital administrators, emergency department staff, and representatives of inpatient psychiatric units in an effort to continue to solicit input on efforts to improve the crisis system of care.

### **Expanding Evidence-Based Trainings for Mental Health Professionals**

In 2021, the Office of Child and Family Services provided a series of no-cost trainings to practitioners across the state in support of the Children's Cabinet goal to expand evidence-based behavioral health services for youth. With support from the Fund for Healthy Maine, OCFS partnered with nationally certified Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) trainers to provide training and consultation at no cost to clinicians in Maine to become nationally certified in TF-CBT. TF-CBT is widely recognized as an effective evidence-based treatment modality. More than 120 clinicians completed all requirements, making them eligible for national certification. Nationally certified clinicians enrolled as MaineCare providers can bill the enhanced TF-CBT rate through Section 65 of the MaineCare Benefits Manual. OCFS worked with the trainers to develop a system of tracking fidelity to the model to ensure youth and families benefit fully from this service.

OCFS also provided Triple P-Positive Parenting training to practitioners. Triple P-Positive Parenting Program is an effective, evidence-based parenting program that provides parents with simple and



practical strategies to help them build strong, healthy relationships with their children and other family members, confidently manage their children's behavior, and prevent problems from developing. Triple P is used in more than 30 countries and has been shown to work across cultures, socio-economic groups and in many kinds of family structures. OCFS provided no-cost training to 80 practitioners in Triple P Standard, Triple P Standard Teen and Pathways. Seventy practitioners reached accreditation in both Triple P Standard and Triple P Standard Teen with 58 practitioners reaching accreditation in Triple P Pathways. Currently, there are four additional cohorts of 20 practitioners (80 total) going through the training with all accreditations scheduled to be completed March 2022.

### **Identifying and Filling Gaps in Maine's System of Treatment and Services for Youth Substance Use Disorder**

For 2021, the Children's Cabinet secured a one-year grant from the John T. Gorman Foundation to fund a Youth Substance Use Disorder Specialist to join the Children's Behavioral Health Team at the Office of Child and Family Services. The specialist spent the last year assessing available SUD services for youth in Maine, identifying strengths and gaps within our existing system, as well as completing research into national best practices pertaining to youth SUD. The specialist also worked with the CBHS team, across state agencies and external stakeholders, including pediatricians and other health care providers, to develop and implement proposals to begin to address some of the shortcomings identified in the system.

CBHS is currently implementing two key proposals designed to meet the urgent needs of youth:

- CBHS staff are working with the medical community to develop and implement a training for health care providers treating youth in need of medically supervised withdrawal. This was identified as a top need for youth struggling with substance use disorder by health care providers across the state.
- The second initiative is focused on co-occurring mental health and substance use disorder. Under this initiative, CBHS staff are working with the purveyors of developmentally appropriate SUD evidence-based practice, known as the Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach, to develop a training for clinicians in primary mental health settings to better support clients with co-occurring SUD needs.

In addition, the Department of Health and Human Services updated the Section 97 rules for Private Non-Medical Institutions and raised rates for both non-hospital, medically necessary withdrawal programs by 77% and adolescent residential rehabilitation services by 35%. The policy specific to youth for Intensive Out-Patient (IOP) was also adjusted to better support adolescent needs by removing the requirement of a four-person minimum, which providers found challenging when working with youth populations. Instead IOP providers are now required to have clinically appropriate minimums while still maintaining a viable group.

The SUD Specialist applied for two federal grants for the purpose of expanding treatment options for youth with SUD in Maine. The grants were submitted to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Association as well as the Department of Justice, and while neither were selected for funding, the research that supported these proposals as well as the proposals themselves can be evaluated and leveraged for use in future grant applications.

Due to the work completed in 2021, there are more developmentally appropriate SUD treatment options for youth. In 2022, the Office of Child and Family

Services will continue to work colleagues in MaineCare, Maine CDC, and Maine Office of Behavioral Services and external stakeholders to provide greater support to existing providers while also encouraging new providers to meet the needs of Maine's youth.

### **Increasing prevention services and programming in schools and Communities**

#### **Strengthening Social Emotional Learning in Maine schools**

Education and prevention research over the past two decades has consistently demonstrated the important and significant positive impacts of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a primary prevention in schools and communities. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines Social Emotional Learning as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.” SEL interventions support and improve a students’ academic success, classroom behavior, ability to manage emotions and stress and, importantly, attitudes about themselves and others.

In 2019, the Department of Education-led state SEL team (consisting of experts, stakeholders from the field, DOE and DHHS members), with funding from both the Fund for Healthy Maine and the Federal CARES Act, purchased a comprehensive pre-K through grade 12 SEL curriculum. The SEL4ME curriculum is CASEL aligned and trauma informed and was customized by Maine experts to meet the diverse needs of our student population across the state. SEL4ME is classroom-based with free online access to any educator or school staff with modules designed to be easily embedded into everyday academics and adapted to supplement remote learning. Additionally, SEL4ME may be accessed by families, caregivers, home-schooled entities, community-based

organizations, and others who work directly with youth in Maine. SEL4ME is for all school district and community programs across the state and provides equal access to resources prioritizing the development of social-emotional competences and the creation of safe and supportive schools, where all students know with certainty that they are safe, respected, valued and represented regardless of race, sexual orientation, or gender.

With over 450 online modules, SEL4ME provides schools with the most recent and up-to-date SEL materials available and can supplement other SEL resources, including school counseling or Second Step programs. SEL4ME also supports social emotional learning standards in Health/Wellness, physical education (PE), and pre-K. Additionally, the DOE offers free SEL training for adults who are interested in expanding knowledge of adult emotional intelligence.

In 2021, there were more than 70,000 SEL4ME curriculum engagements and more than 8,700 registered student users of the curriculums. In the fall of 2021, the Maine DOE SEL4ME Team began piloting an intensive professional development series, providing teachers with an adult Emotional Intelligence training and on-going training in how to incorporate social emotional learning into their coursework as well as curriculum development in the use of SEL as a Primary Prevention and Trauma-Informed practice.

Throughout 2022, the Maine DOE SEL4ME Team plans to continue to edit and develop new SEL content and trainings to provide schools with more tools to meet the social emotional needs of students to support them to thrive and reach their full potential.

### **Improving Prevention and Treatment Services and Environments for Students in Schools**

The staff at the Adolescent and School Health Program at the Maine Center for Disease Control (Maine CDC) work with state and community partners to ensure that youth have access to prevention programs, accessible health services, and supportive school environments. With funding from the Fund for Healthy Maine, the Maine CDC 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 in 2020 and 2021. These efforts are implemented in coordination with and augment the efforts at Maine DOE to expand social emotional learning and support school professionals to meet the behavioral health needs of Maine students. While the pandemic has hindered some of these efforts, the Maine CDC and its partners have found ways to implement these strategies which include:

- **Working with Maine Youth Advocates Network to provide restorative practices support, education, and technical assistance in schools.** Through July 2021, Maine Youth Advocates Network conducted 11 restorative practices train-

*“Our school has partnered with the DOE for a multi-year SEL4ME pilot program to address the disparities in the social and emotional lags educators are seeing in our students directly related to the disruption and isolation brought on by the COVID pandemic. Anchored by the comprehensive offerings of SEL4ME and the flexibility of teacher led or self-guided lessons, this curriculum will be at the heart of reconnecting with our students to reduce behavior that interferes with learning while forming a strong foundation of developmentally appropriate universal messaging. It is our sincere belief that using SEL4ME in every classroom will build capacity and resilience within our students to form an optimum learning environment, while supporting our educators in the efforts to reconnect students to school. Our goal is to rebuild a safe, supported space for students so that they can learn and grow to meet their full potential”*

—Meg Swanson, PreK-8 School Counselor,  
Vassalboro Community School

ing series with youth, trained 137 adults in restorative practices, and provided 271 youth-serving providers and organizations with technical assistance on implementing restorative practices.

- **Increasing training and technical assistance for behavioral health organizations on effective screening and identification of suicide prevention for youth living with a substance use disorder.** Existing trainings (including Mental Health First Aid, Gatekeeper, and Suicide Prevention Awareness) were revised to address intersections between suicide and substance use disorder prevention. Over 600 individuals were trained.
- **Expanding implementation of the Zero Suicide Model among health care providers, Federally Qualified Health Centers and behavioral health organizations.** Four health care and behavioral health organizations implemented the Zero Suicide model, including assessing suicide-safer care policies, implementing workplans, training staff, and enhancing electronic health records.

In 2022, Maine CDC will continue to partner with Maine Youth Action Network to train youth and school staff on establishing positive environments in our schools through restorative practices. In addition, the Maine DOE's School Safety Center is hiring a Restorative Practices Coordinator to develop and implement a plan to support Maine schools to move away from often counter-productive zero-tolerance discipline policies and toward restorative approaches to address conflict in schools in order to foster positive and health school climates for all students. As active participants in the work of the Children's Cabinet, staff from Maine CDC and DOE will coordinate and learn from each other's efforts to expand restorative practices in our schools.

### **Expanding Opportunities for Youth to Participate in Meaningful Paid Work Experience and Career Exploration**

The Governor's Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan includes \$25 million to build out career exploration programming for Maine youth. The Children's Cabinet is working closely with colleagues at the Department of Economic and Community Development to coor-

dinate this expansion of opportunities for youth to participate in paid work experience, work-based learning or internships. Participation in paid work prior to high school graduation is proven to be a strong indicator of future success. These programs help youth gain valuable 21st century and foundational skills, connections to employers and a better understanding of career opportunities.

The Children's Cabinet is specifically focused on ensuring that career exploration and meaningful paid work experience programming effectively reaches key populations of youth including young people with disabilities, connected to the juvenile justice system, experiencing homelessness, transitioning in or out of the foster care system, with low-income, of color and from indigenous communities.

The Children's Cabinet released a request for information to community organizations to learn more about existing career exploration and work-based learning programming serving these populations, to identify gaps in programming and supports and to better understand effective career exploration practices and programs and what support services are critical for youth to succeed. The results of the Request for Information will inform the development of a Request for Application for grants to fund new and expanded community-based programming to successfully engage underserved youth in meaningful paid work experience.





The Department of Economic and Community Development, in partnership with staff at the Department of Education and the Department of Labor, will take the lead in expanding work-based learning in an effort to get closer to Maine’s 10 Year State Economic Strategy goal to provide students the option for a six-month paid internship between their junior year of high school or within one year after high school graduation.

The Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan also includes funding for the Department of Labor (DOL) to expand pre-apprenticeship programming. DOL will target youth between the ages of 16 to 24 at Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, high schools and out-of-school youth in need of gainful employment leading to financial stability and professional success. High-quality pre-apprenticeship programs provide foundational job and soft-skill training necessary to bridge trainees to successful employment as apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship programs can be delivered through high schools, adult education providers, community colleges, labor organizations, community-based organizations or workforce agencies.

## CONCLUSION

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The Children’s Cabinet made significant progress in implementing strategies towards its two goals in 2021. In 2022, the Cabinet will continue work to adjust to the impacts of the pandemic which has created new and different challenges for children, youth, and their families. The Cabinet applauds the tireless efforts of professionals, including health care providers, early childhood educators, public school teachers, school administrators, social services providers and staff across Maine’s state agencies, who are working to meet the needs of children, youth, and families during this difficult and challenging time.

In 2022, the Children’s Cabinet will build upon its accomplishments in 2021 and expand its efforts. The unprecedented investment of federal funding through the American Rescue Plan will provide a unique opportunity for the Cabinet to coordinate, align and strengthen Maine’s programming and systems for children and families laying the foundation for the long-term success of all children in Maine, helping them to flourish and meet their full potential.





# 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

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.

- 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

## 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.

- 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 the child’s 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.



# 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.

### Areas of Focus

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.

### Children’s Cabinet Strategies

#### Short term strategies: 2020 - 2021

- Train 3 cohorts of Maine therapists (for a total of 180) in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.
- Strengthen children’s crisis services to keep youth with their families, starting with a demonstration project in a rural area.
- 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.
- Increase access to youth substance use disorder treatment in primary care practices and school-based health centers.
- 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.
- 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.



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