

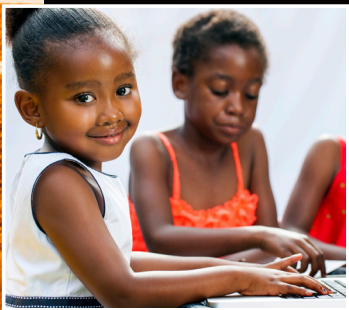


STRONG START KY

PRICHARD COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

PROGRESS AND NEXT STEPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD IN KENTUCKY: BIRTH THROUGH THIRD GRADE

A report of the Early Childhood
Education Study Group



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
PROGRESS SINCE 2007 STRONG START KENTUCKY REPORT	5
THE CASE FOR CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION	7
RECOMMENDATIONS	10
LINKING EARLY CHILDHOOD TO THIRD GRADE PROFICIENCY	10
COMMUNITY COLLABORATION	11
HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT	11
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	12
FUNDING	13
GLOSSARY	14
ENDNOTES	15



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last 15 years, since the enactment of KIDS NOW reforms, Kentucky has made smart investments in early childhood education – increasing access, changing policy and practice to support high-quality early learning environments, and building a data infrastructure for continuous improvement. Yet, much remains to be done to ensure all infants, toddlers and young children across the Commonwealth, particularly those in greatest need, are prepared for each new step in their educational journeys.

This report highlights priority next steps for Kentucky's investment in early childhood education. It contains guidance from the Early Childhood Education Study Group, convened by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in fall 2014. Most importantly, the report builds on the 2007 Prichard Committee report, *Strong Start Kentucky: Investing in Quality Early Care & Education to Ensure Future Success*, with a new call to action for Kentucky to focus on early education as a seamless continuum from birth through third grade.

The Early Childhood Education Study Group's guidance stems from the following vision:

All Kentucky children, birth to age 8, will have intellectually engaging, imaginative, and culturally responsive learning experiences that extend their curiosity and support social and emotional health and well-being. Developmentally appropriate early childhood experiences will immerse children in hands-on inquiry, sensory- and language-rich environments that support their potential to be creative and critical thinkers. As a result, all children will be well prepared for success in kindergarten and proficient in math and reading by the end of third grade.

Since the release of the 2007 Strong Start report, much progress has been made, including the following:

- State and local leaders developed a common definition of kindergarten readiness and implemented a universal screener.
- Kentucky received a \$44 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, which supported wise investment in infrastructure.
- The Kentucky General Assembly increased preschool funding for the first time in eight years, allowing about 5,000 additional children to attend state-funded preschool.
- State agencies have collaborated to link data systems to support continuous improvement.
- The state has encouraged and succeeded in increasing enrollment in STARS, the child care quality rating system.

But there is far more to do.

Too few low-income families receive support for child care, and there is still too little access to high-quality care. In the fall of 2015, only 50 percent of incoming kindergarteners were deemed ready for kindergarten based on the state's universal screener, and only 54.3 percent of third graders were proficient in reading and 47.6 percent in mathematics, based upon K-PREP scores.⁶ If this trend continues, our challenges will only grow.

The recommendations in this report fall into five areas. Each includes policy recommendations as well as ways communities can support early childhood efforts. The recommendations encompass the continuum of early childhood and are rooted in the latest research about the importance of early brain development, family engagement, social-emotional skills, and early reading and math literacy. They represent an expansion of focus to include children birth through end of third grade.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Linking Early Childhood Education through Third Grade

- Ensure elementary school leadership is knowledgeable and skilled in supporting early childhood and that district leadership and local boards of education are knowledgeable about the early childhood programs and outcomes in their district and community.
- Align and expand professional teacher preparation and development for infant through early elementary settings.
- Support effective transitions from toddler to preschool experiences, then into kindergarten and primary grades, with a focus on communication between programs and with families.
- Equip early childhood and primary teachers with knowledge and skills to implement culturally responsive, authentic, and holistic instruction that ensures welcoming instructional environments for children of all backgrounds.

Community Collaboration

- Highlight successful community collaborations as best practices to support young children and their families.
- Encourage and incentivize public-private collaborative models for preschool between schools and community-based providers by identifying opportunities to blend program funding and streamline regulations.
- Enhance interagency communication at the state and local levels to identify and implement processes that promote collaboration.

Health and Development

- Ensure as many families as possible have access to home visiting and parent support programs like HANDS and United Way Born Learning® Academies.
- Build awareness about the impact of toxic stress and equip case workers and health professionals with tools to intervene; include use of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey during well child visits.

- Support multiple measures of readiness and comprehensive early childhood development, inclusive of physical health and social-emotional development, along with cognitive development.

Family Engagement

- Dedicate funding to family engagement in all early childhood development and education programs.
- Support two-generation approaches that build partnerships among early education programs, schools, and job training programs for maximum sustained early childhood and family impact.
- Expand effective parent engagement programs like HANDS home visiting and United Way Born Learning® Academies; support new initiatives like Strengthening Families; extend family engagement efforts into the early elementary years to support early reading and math literacy.

Funding

- Expand eligibility to provide child care assistance and preschool to all children in families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Ensure public dollars are spent to increase the availability of high-quality programs that support early childhood development and kindergarten readiness.
- Expand home visiting programs like HANDS to provide services to all interested parents and extend the program to provide services from prenatal to age 3.
- Appropriate state General Fund dollars to support early childhood programs and services to compensate for the decline in the Master Tobacco Settlement funds that currently support early childhood.

PROGRESS SINCE THE 2007 STRONG START REPORT

The 2007 Prichard Committee report, *Strong Start Kentucky: Investing in Quality Early Care and Education to Ensure Future Success*, detailed a list of 20 recommendations, many of which have become reality over the past seven years. Notable examples include the following:

Definition of Kindergarten Readiness

In 2009, Governor Steve Beshear appointed a task force on Early Childhood Education and Development. The task force developed a common definition of kindergarten readiness that is now widely used in early care and education settings and supported by the Kentucky Department of Education. The definition recognizes five domains of readiness: approaches to learning, health and physical well-being, language and communication development, social and emotional development, and cognitive and general knowledge.

Universal Statewide Kindergarten Readiness Screener

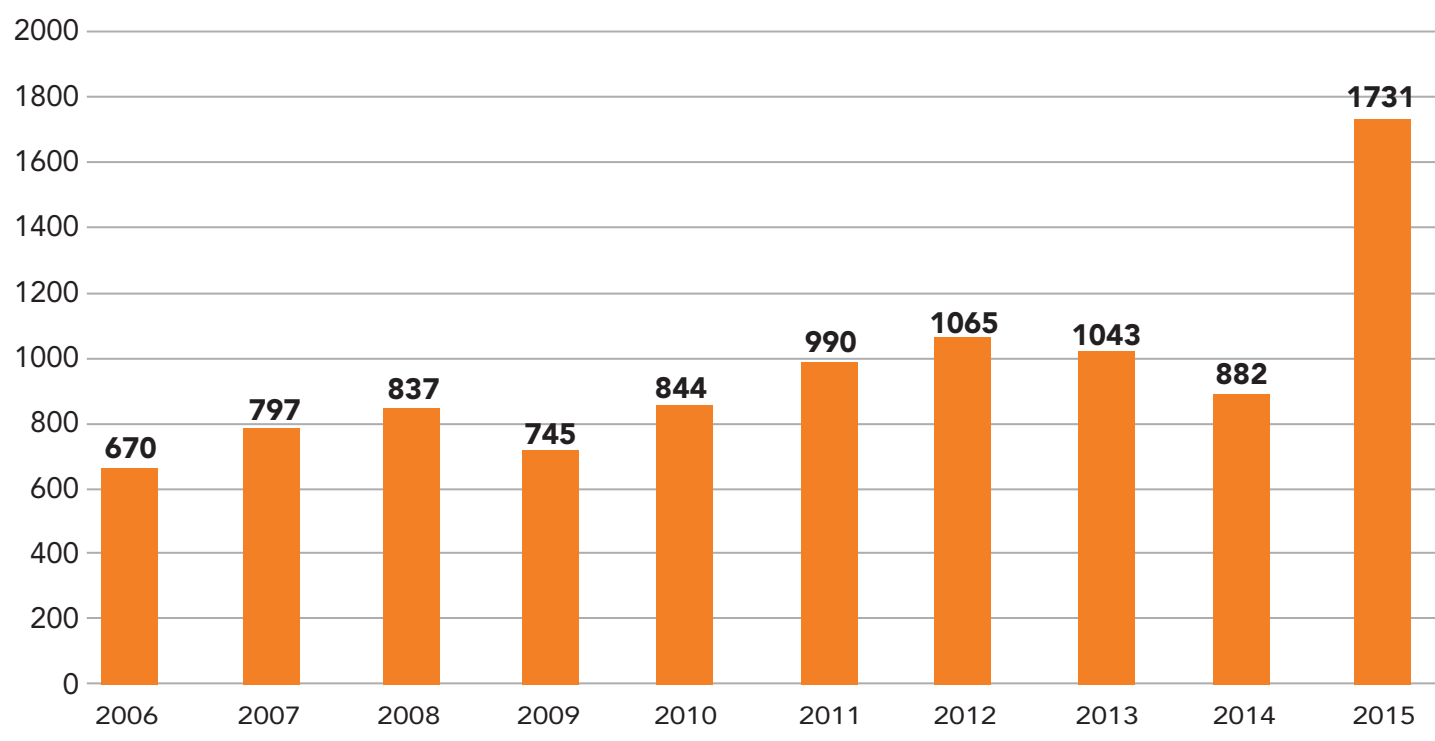
The task force recommended a statewide universal screener be used as one indicator of kindergarten readiness. The Kentucky Board of Education approved a regulation requiring all schools to screen entering kindergarteners, in alignment with Kentucky's school readiness definition.

The BRIGANCE Early Childhood Kindergarten Screener, selected as the statewide universal screener and piloted in the 2012-2013 school year, was required for all districts beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. The results are now published in the Kentucky Department of Education's School Report Card and reported to communities from the Governor's Office of Early Childhood via the Early Childhood County Profiles.

Increases in Funding

HANDS Funding – The Kentucky Department for Public Health received funding through the Maternal, Infant, and

Figure 1: Participation in STARS for KIDS NOW Quality Rating System



Source: Department for Community-Based Services, Division of Child Care, as of November 13, 2015

Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV), a component of the Affordable Care Act. The grant required a statewide needs assessment ranking all 120 Kentucky counties according to a set of specified indicators to identify high-risk communities. In those communities the state proposed a plan to enhance existing home visiting services using one of the designated evidence-based home visiting models. Services were expanded in 78 counties.

Preschool Expansion - The General Assembly provided \$18 million in FY 2016 to expand public preschool for 4-year-olds up to 160 percent of poverty. This was a significant investment in helping prepare more children for school success.

Quality Investments

Many of the 2007 recommendations urged an awareness of and increased investment in quality early care and education programs. Kentucky was the third state in the nation to implement a quality rating system for child care. STARS for KIDS NOW, Kentucky's quality rating system, was piloted in 2001 and implemented statewide in 2002. Since 2007, the number of child care centers participating in the voluntary rating system has grown. A new quality rating system (ALL-STARS) is being piloted in 2015. Legislation approved in 2015 requires participation in the rating system for all early childhood programs that receive public funds, including public and private child care, public preschool and Head Start.

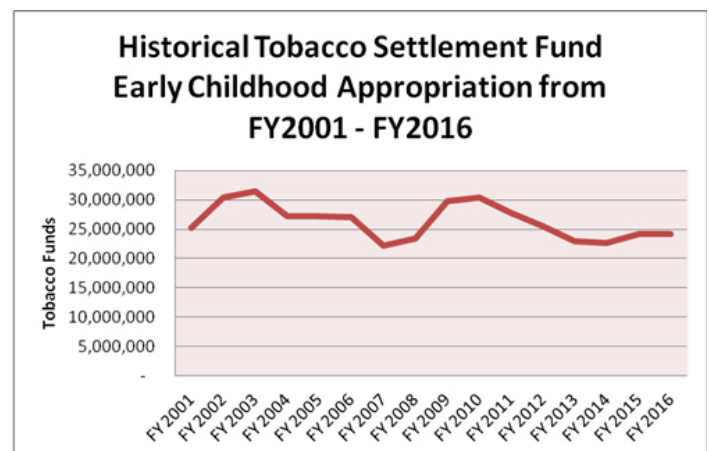
Data Systems

Kentucky has implemented improved and linked data systems which will help communities and agencies develop strategies for improving services to young children and their families. It integrates data from multiple partners, which will eventually allow partners to evaluate successes or concerns at an early stage. Data reporting is a key strategy for the Governor's Office of Early Childhood and the Early Childhood Advisory Council. Public reporting through the Early Childhood Profiles, created in partnership with the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics, has proven to be a valuable tool for counties and school districts to identify priority areas for improvement.

Future of Funding

Beginning in FY2001, the Kentucky General Assembly has allocated 25% of the Tobacco Settlement Fund to the Early Childhood Development Fund, which contributes to community early childhood councils, scholarships for child care providers, HANDS home visiting, and a variety of other programs. While this was a point of progress, the funds are declining. The state must find permanent funding solutions for the early childhood investments now covered by these funds.

Figure 2: Appropriations from the Tobacco Settlement Fund



Many families need financial support to send their children to child care while they work. The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial support to thousands of Kentucky families. After a recent reduction in CCAP funding that cut the number of families receiving support, the legislature restored needed CCAP allocations in the 2014 General Assembly. Yet much remains to be done to ensure that all families in need have support they need to cover the cost of child care.

Funding for CCAP and preschool for 4-year olds should be expanded to 200% of the current poverty level, which is seen as the point at which families begin to have financial self-sufficiency. Families below this income level cannot afford quality child care and preschool, hampering their success in the workforce. Incentivizing innovative partnerships between private and public providers is an essential part of this investment, ensuring available, quality environments for children across Kentucky.

THE CASE FOR CONTINUED INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In 2007, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence released *Strong Start Kentucky: Investing in Quality Early Care and Education to Ensure Future Success*. The report, based on recommendations from the Strong Start Kentucky Policy and Planning Group, reviewed the state of early care and education in Kentucky and made a number of recommendations to move toward success in the early years. Many of these recommendations have been adopted, yet much work remains. This new report, *Progress and Next Steps in Kentucky: Birth through Third Grade*, takes a look at the environment in early childhood today, celebrates the progress made over the last decade, and puts forth a framework for going forward. The study group gathered three times in the fall of 2014 to review issues, hear presentations from state and national early childhood experts, and recommend next steps to improve early care and education services, increase kindergarten readiness, and ensure reading and math proficiency for all students by the end of third grade.



The Imperative for Third Grade Proficiency

Kentuckians want a strong future – with a vibrant economy fueled by citizens who are productive members of the workforce and their communities. Unfortunately, Kentucky faces significant challenges in achieving this goal. To get there, the best economic investment we can make is in early education that gives all students a foundation for proficiency in reading and math by third grade.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation report, *Early Warning, Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*, “The current pool of qualified high school graduates is neither large enough nor skilled enough to supply our nation’s workforce, higher education, leadership and national security needs.” This disparity stems from “...millions of American children (who) get to fourth grade without learning to read proficiently. And that puts them on the dropout track.” Students are taught *how* to read through third grade. After that, they read *to learn*. This is why reading by the end of third grade is such a critical benchmark. We must focus on building a coherent continuum across birth to third grade to get our youngest citizens on track for future success.

Today, Kentucky has a long way to go before all children display proficiency in reading and math by third grade. According to 2014-15 results from the state K-PREP assessment, only 47.6 percent of third grade students scored proficient or distinguished in math, while 54.3 percent did



so in reading. Clear disparities exist among student groups in math, with only 29.3 percent of African-American third-graders, 36.8 percent of Hispanic students, and 50.6 percent of White students scoring proficient or distinguished. Similarly, 32.6 percent of African-American third grade students, 40.7 percent of Hispanic students, and 58.2 percent of White students scored proficient or advanced in reading. Disparities also appear between students who qualify and do not qualify for free or reduced price meals.

The Need to Start Early

These achievement gaps begin in the critical early childhood years. In the 2014-15 school year, only 50 percent of all Kentucky's incoming kindergarten students scored fully prepared for school on the BRIGANCE kindergarten screener, which provides a composite readiness score comprising cognitive/general knowledge, and language and communication. In other words, over half of our students are starting school behind, with readiness rates far lower for Hispanic students, students with limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, and students who qualify for free/reduced-price meals.¹

Research has revealed that most brain development occurs before the age of 5.² Studies also have shown that by the age of 3, there can be as much as a 30 million word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families; the disparity is evident by 18 months.³ Vocabulary of young children tends to mirror the vocabulary they hear from their parents. The development of achievement gaps begins before children reach kindergarten, so strategies to address these gaps must include engaging families in comprehensive approaches. Initiatives such as the two-generation approach advocated by the Annie E Casey Foundation, the Aspen Institute and other organizations underscore the need for interventions at a young age to ensure long-term success.⁴ Here in Kentucky, initiatives like HANDS that include home visiting and workshops like United Way Born Learning® Academies are producing positive results for the state's youngest children.

Kentucky is in the middle of the pack across states when it comes to access to and investment in early childhood education, according to *The State of Preschool 2014* report by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). Kentucky is ranked 17th in access to preschool for 4-year olds, but 30th in state spending. About 46 percent of 4-year-olds in the Commonwealth are enrolled in either state-funded preschool or Head Start.⁵

Figure 3: Kindergarten Readiness Rates

	2014-15	2013-14
All Students	50.0	49.0
Male	44.6	43.6
Female	55.6	54.5
White (Non-Hispanic)	52.1	51.2
African American	46.3	44.2
Hispanic	28.7	28.0
Asian	64.2	61.6
American Indian or Alaska Native	45.5	49.2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	49.0	51.4
Two or more races	51.0	50.5
Limited English Proficiency	28.7	26.1
Free/Reduced-Price Meals	39.4	37.6
Disability-With IEP (Total)	27.6	28.2

Source: Kentucky School Report Card⁶

International Competitiveness

Internationally, preschool enrollment in the U.S. is a relatively small percentage. As noted in a recent report, *Education at a Glance 2012*, the U.S. was below the median of the 34 developed countries studied by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The report concluded that investments in early childhood continue to increase globally.⁶ Other nations, such as global education leaders Ontario, Finland, and Singapore, provide more support for early care and education. According to the National Center for Education and the Economy, of these jurisdictions, Finland offers the greatest support for children and families, providing affordable childcare for all families. Singapore has been significantly increasing investments in access and quality of early childhood education, while Ontario provides generous subsidies for a broad set of families.

Returns on Investment

Economic research supports the benefit of investing in early childhood education. In Kentucky, data from the University of Kentucky supports a return on investment over a child's lifetime of \$5 for every \$1 invested.⁷ A recent report from Ready Nation demonstrates a short-term economic impact from early childhood investments at the local level of \$1.64 for every \$1 invested.⁸

Economics is by far not the only factor to consider. Quality early learning experiences have been proven to lead to a higher quality of life, better executive skills from social and emotional development, higher lifetime earnings, and a lower incidence of crime.⁹

Our society is rapidly changing, with more families sliding into economic insecurity.¹⁰ Children are increasingly at risk of not having a successful educational experience. Research proves that if students are behind by third grade, they are exponentially at risk of dropping out of high school, being incarcerated, developing risky behaviors, and other negative outcomes. Kentucky needs to provide multiple supports in the early years to give students the best opportunity to become successful, productive citizens.

Kentucky faces many challenges - high poverty, relatively low preschool enrollment, weak kindergarten readiness and third grade reading scores that are improving too slowly. The situation requires serious consideration of additional investments and the development of effective strategies to spur the state toward providing greater opportunities for its citizens and stronger prospects for its future economic success.



RECOMMENDATIONS BY FOCUS AREA

LINKING TO THIRD GRADE PROFICIENCY

CASE: A focus on birth through third grade with a goal of every child proficient in reading and math by third grade is critical to our success as a Commonwealth. Investing early to ensure basic skills are in place will keep students on track for graduation and post-high school learning, which is essential for the jobs of the future. The costs to society in lost earnings and taxes as well as incarceration and assistance programs are too high not to invest early.¹¹

Key Recommendations

- Ensure elementary school leadership is knowledgeable and skilled in supporting early childhood and that district leadership and local boards of education are knowledgeable about the early childhood programs and outcomes in their district and community.
- Align and expand professional teacher preparation and development for infant through early childhood settings.
- Support effective transitions from toddler to preschool experiences, then into kindergarten and early childhood grades, with a focus on communication between programs and with families.

- Equip early childhood and primary teachers with knowledge and skills to implement culturally responsive, authentic, and holistic instruction that ensure welcoming instructional environments for children of all backgrounds.

Strategies to Consider

- Align and focus on coordination in six primary areas:
 - Learning standards
 - Learning assessments
 - Continuous improvement and accountability
 - Teacher/leader preparation and professional learning
 - Resource allocation and reallocation
 - Leadership and governance
- Strategies to develop social and emotional learning standards for K-3.
- Require schools to include preparation for and transitioning to kindergarten in their improvement plans.
- Expand elementary principal certification to preschool to 12.



COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

CASE: To expand capacity to meet the needs of our early students, communities must collaborate to maximize the resources available to ensure that we enroll as many children as possible in high-quality settings. No one institution can do this alone. We must also ensure that parents have high-quality and affordable child care options so they can continue to work. In addition, we must assure that child care providers have the resources to provide quality programming.

Key Recommendations

- Highlight successful community collaborations as best practices to support young children and their families.
- Encourage and incentivize public-private collaborative models for preschool between schools and community-based providers by identifying opportunities to blend program funding and streamline regulations.
- Enhance interagency communication at the state and local levels to identify and implement processes that promote collaboration.

Strategies to Consider

- Communities could use collaborative efforts to provide preschool in mixed delivery models, with flexibility allowed to meet the unique needs of each community.
- Align rules and regulations for various early childhood programs (child care, Head Start, state preschool) to facilitate collaborative efforts.
- Establish joint training and professional learning opportunities for child care, Head Start, state preschool, and primary school educators.
- Recognize the importance of full-day kindergarten by increasing funding in the SEEK formula.
- Community collaborations can include any community resources available: nonprofits, agencies, faith-based organizations and others. Communities should be encouraged to be creative and flexible in determining the best way to leverage existing resources to maximize the number of children served.

HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

CASE: Children can only learn effectively when their basic needs are met. Food, shelter, safety, freedom from fear, and the development of supportive relationships must be addressed before children can effectively turn their attention to learning. Research consistently supports the fact that children who eat well, exercise, and enjoy a stable environment do better academically.¹² Recent research has identified significant and long-term connections between adverse outcomes and adverse experiences during the early years. Early attention to protective factors can counteract negative effects.¹³ We recognize that measures like the Brigance readiness screener reflect realities of basic needs and will not improve without comprehensive attention to poverty.

Key Recommendations

- Ensure as many families as possible have access to home visiting and family support programs like HANDS and United Way bornlearning® academies.
- Build awareness about the impact of toxic stress and equip case workers and health professionals with tools to intervene, including use of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey (ACES) during well child visits.
- Support multiple measures of readiness and comprehensive early childhood development, inclusive of physical health and social-emotional development, along with cognitive development.



Strategies to Consider

- Support the Kentucky Strengthening Families initiative, promoting protective factors.
- Build awareness of ACES beyond the early childhood and behavioral health communities; promote the dissemination of information.
- Incorporate trauma-informed practices training into professional development for teachers and behavioral health providers.
- Focus on oral health, including preventative fluoride treatments for children.
- Address childhood obesity issues/lack of physical activity.
- Assure the quality of mental health services with more providers entering the field.
- Address increasing incidence of asthma.
- Provide professional development for teachers and youth program workers in recognizing trauma.
- Expand the reach of the HANDS program to more families.



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

CASE: Research consistently shows that engaging families in learning is a critical part of success, particularly in turning around low-performing schools and improving student learning. Students need to work hard to stay on track in academic and developmental achievement and need supports both in and out of school to make it a reality.¹⁴ Authentic family engagement means that adults both at school and home must be willing to adapt and learn to maximize student success.

Key Recommendations

- Dedicate funding to family engagement in all early childhood development and education programs.
- Support two-generation approaches that build partnerships among early education programs, schools, and job training programs for maximum sustained early childhood and family impact.
- Expand effective parent engagement programs like HANDS home visiting and United Way Born Learning® Academies; support new initiatives like Kentucky Strengthening Families; extend family engagement efforts into the early elementary years to support the exchange of information and learning with a focus on early reading and math literacy.

Strategies to Consider

- Promote a shared definition of family engagement across all programs, institutions, and systems.
- Advocate to embed the Strengthening Families framework, which works with families to develop six important coping skills, into all agencies, institutions and systems.
- Share information with families at the birth of their children, through partnerships with nurses, pediatricians' offices, health clinics, etc.
- Engage all agencies that work with families in public awareness, including KET, libraries, nonprofits, etc.

FUNDING

CASE: To achieve a positive economic climate, we must prepare students to become contributing members of society. The best way to do this is to invest in a rich, forward-thinking education system for all students with a focus on those living in poverty. Research supports investments that will yield the best results, and highest returns on investment are in early education.

Key Recommendations for Resource Investment

- Expand eligibility to provide child care assistance and preschool to all children in families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Ensure public dollars are spent to increase the availability of high-quality programs that support early childhood development and kindergarten readiness.
- Expand home visiting programs like HANDS to provide services to all interested parents and extend the program to provide services from prenatal to age 3.
- Appropriate state general fund dollars to support early childhood programs and services to compensate for the decline in the Master Tobacco Settlement funds that currently support early childhood.

Strategies to Consider

- Increase funding to provide maternal depression screening and assistance to all HANDS families
- Provide incentives to encourage collaboration so more children are served at community-based locations.
- Secure reimbursement for child care tied to quality.
- Continue and increase funding to provide technical assistance to school districts to help them develop and expand state funded preschools.
- Specify funding for family engagement in program grants from the state.
- Encourage health care providers, health departments, and other community-based service providers to work together to support home visitation with recruitment and service

- Support schools, child care providers, resource and referral agencies, and local early childhood councils to work together to assess needs for preschool and to identify, support, and participate in providing quality preschool, blending community resources.
- Solicit effective public-private partnerships to collaborate on efforts to provide funding and apply for grants, showing a united effort with resources maximized.

The study group encourages policymakers at all levels to search for constructive ways to support early care and education in Kentucky. Thoughtful citizens, making informed decisions every day, can solve complex problems. Through a multi-pronged approach, early interventions can solve problems before they begin.





GLOSSARY

ACES – Adverse Childhood Events Study - The ACE Study is a joint effort of the CDC and Kaiser Permanente. The study takes a whole life perspective from conception to death. It was designed to uncover how adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are strongly related to development and prevalence of risk factors for disease and health and social well-being throughout the lifespan. The correlation is exceedingly strong, especially with 3 or more adverse childhood experiences.

BRIGANCE - the BRIGANCE kindergarten screen is an accurate, valid, and reliable tool that is a screener to assess five development areas: approaches to learning; health and physical well-being; language and communication development; social and emotional development; and cognitive and general knowledge. The Brigance is a snapshot screener rather than a comprehensive assessment tool.

CECC – Community Early Childhood Councils. “The primary goal of all Community Early Childhood Councils (CECCs) is to build innovative, collaborative partnerships that promote school readiness for children and families. As a vehicle for bringing together community members to support issues of importance to children and families, CECCs have a long history of success at supporting school readiness by responding to the unique needs of their own communities.” (Governor’s Office of Early Childhood)

ECAC - the Early Childhood Advisory Council – created in 2011 by Governor Steve Beshear.

GOEC – Governor’s Office of Early Childhood – created in 2011 by Governor Steve Beshear to oversee the Kids Now initiatives.

KIDS NOW – Comprehensive legislation enacted in 2000. 25% percent of Kentucky’s Tobacco Master Settlement agreement dollars are dedicated to Kids Now programs.

STARS – The STARS for KIDS NOW program is Kentucky’s voluntary quality rating improvement system for Licensed Type I, Type II and Certified Family Child Care Homes. Programs are rated using a one- to four-STAR level system

Strengthening Families - Kentucky Strengthening Families (KYSF) is a multi-disciplinary partnership of more than 20 national, state and local, and public and private organizations dedicated to embedding six research-based protective factors into services and supports for children and their families as a key strategy for promoting school readiness and preventing child abuse and neglect. The partners work to support families and build their coping skills to help during times of stress, to prevent the likelihood of abuse and provide stronger support for children experiencing stressful events. Kentucky Strengthening Families uses a nationally recognized strategy—Strengthening Families: A Protective Factors Framework, coordinated nationally by the Center for the Study of Social Policy.



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