



State Early Childhood Advisory Council

of Mississippi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*FROM BIRTH TO BEYOND:
Developing a System of Early Care and Education
for Mississippi's Preschool Children*



December 2009

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council of Mississippi is committed to the vision of one coordinated system of quality care and education for Mississippi's children birth to five.

Fulfilling the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (Public Law 110-134)*, {42 USC 9801 et seq.}, Gov. Haley Barbour established the State Early Childhood Advisory Council of Mississippi (SECAC-MS) and appointed representatives of state agencies, Head Start, local education agencies, providers of early childhood services, and business leaders with Dr. Cathy Grace as Chair. In July 2009, Dr. Grace requested a leave from SECAC-MS and Nadine Coleman began serving as the Interim Chair. In 2009, the following members were appointed: Stacy Callender, Executive Director of SECAC-MS; Catherine Cliburn, State Department of Health; Jill Dent, Department of Human Services; Fiona Qualls, State Board for Community and Junior Colleges; Festus Simkins, State Department of Health; Holly Spivey, State Head Start Collaboration Director; and Tanya Tullos, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

In June 2009, a non-competitive grant opportunity was announced for each state to turn their recommendations into reality. During the later part of 2009, the Council focused on data collection and strategies for efficient service delivery around the 2008 recommendations to facilitate the writing of a grant proposal to secure \$1.5 million over the next three years.

The following provides updates to address the 2008 recommendations:

Recommendation 1: *The Governor will appoint an Executive Director for the State Early Childhood Advisory Council through which programs and services related to the education, health, mental health and social services for children (and their families) prior to birth through age eight will be better coordinated.*

- In 2009, the Governor appointed an Executive Director for the SECAC-MS.

Recommendation 2: *Develop a family/child-centered information/data system and sharing process that will ensure significant improvement in the delivery of high quality early care and education services built around a logic model where information collected will serve to improve the system or service(s) in question.*

The data committee:

- began work on a core set of data elements to help inform policy and practices in the education of young children;
- participated in the Mississippi submission for the State Longitudinal Data System grant offered by the U.S. Department of Education to build a comprehensive data system to track individuals from birth through placement in the workforce;
- began a study of intake forms across the agencies to determine if a common intake form could be developed to minimize the paperwork burden and increase program efficiency;
- initiated conversations within state agency partners and federal staff concerning data sharing and confidentiality regulations.

Recommendation 3: *Develop and implement a work force development plan for individuals seeking to be employed as early childhood educators.*

The workforce development committee:

- surveyed public universities and community colleges that revealed a shortage in highly qualified teacher educators and uneven consistency of teacher education program quality;
- noted a growing demand for early care and education teachers that will not be met under the current teacher preparation system;

- identified that better use of technology in delivering classes and other forms of technical assistance could reduce barriers to moving the system forward;
- recognized that wages for early care and education teachers are not comparable with public school teachers/assistant teachers in K-3 who hold the same degree as well as inequities in pay between Head Start teachers and non-Head Start teachers.

Recommendation 4: Develop a process by which early childhood services occurs for the purpose of supplying communities with information and coordinated service models for replication across the state.

The coordinated services committee:

- assessed current service delivery models to determine barriers to creating community systems as well as the strengths/solutions upon which to build;
- determined the need for a review of federal and state regulations to determine where programs serving young children and their families could better coordinate local services;
- recommends increased use of the MS Child Care Resource & Referral system to serve families and other early care and education providers better.

Recommendation 5: Review and revise existing registry requirements related to family child care homes.

The in-home provider registry committee:

- sent letters to over 5000 in-home providers soliciting voluntary registry and providing information about the Nurturing Homes Initiative, of whom thus far over 220 have agreed to participate;
- is collecting information voluntarily from in-home family child care providers;
- is developing an in-home provider scale on the MS Child Care Quality Step System;
- is proposing legislation to shift oversight responsibilities for the registry/certification of home-based providers to the Mississippi Department of Human Services.

Recommendation 6: Develop and implement a process by which health access issues are addressed for children ages zero to five.

The health access committee:

- assisted the State ICC for Early Intervention secure representation from the Division of Medicaid;
- studied state options to adjust EPSDT regulations to better suit the needs of the state;
- is currently reviewing the availability of pediatric dental and mental health services.

SECAC-MS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2010

- Promote improved access to educational opportunities for teachers of infants and toddlers through implementing training on early learning guidelines and corresponding curriculum;
- Develop a unified data collection system for comprehensive early childhood education and development programs throughout Mississippi;
- Implement a career advancement ladder for early childhood educators in Mississippi;
- Maintain current budgetary allocation for the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System and Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

The State Early Childhood Advisory Council has succinctly crafted a plan for early care and education services at the local level connected through statewide systems for young children and their families. This plan provides a clear direction for individuals and agencies charged to enact it. Now is the time for the efficient and effective use of Mississippi intelligence and spirit to move the early childhood agenda forward. With the implementation of the recommendations submitted in this report, the quality of life for current and future generations of preschool children and their families will be greatly improved.

This executive summary was prepared by the
State Early Childhood Advisory Council

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