

Karen Ponder<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction • • •

Fifteen years ago, young children and their families had limited access to the high quality services and programs that were needed to assure that children arrived at school ready to succeed. Now in at least 18 other states, public-private partnerships exist between the state and local communities that are focused on comprehensive early childhood services. As a result of the pioneering work of state and local leaders, children are better prepared to reach school healthy and ready for success than ever before. North Carolina's Governor Beverly Perdue points to the state's early childhood focus and collaborative work at the state and local levels as the reason for significant improvements in North Carolina's end of grade test scores.

What we most care about in Washington are thriving children and families. Period. How do we get that result? The same way that other states have done it: by building an early learning system that affords young children and their families access to high quality services, programs, and resources that provide a coordinated continuum of services to support better outcomes for young children.

Building this coordinated continuum of services requires connecting state leaders and local communities, it requires cross-sector state and local planning, communication, coordinated action and decision-making and the use of data for continuous improvement. Eighteen states now have state and local "early learning collaborative leadership and accountability structures" designed to afford children what they need when they need it, based on individual child and family needs and available resources.

The purpose of this paper is to describe collaborative leadership and accountability structures, to highlight their impacts in states that are using this approach, and to share their lessons learned.

## Description of an Early Learning Collaborative Leadership and Accountability Structure

The state and local aspects of this structure can take several forms, a nonprofit partnership, public agency, council or other entity. The state and local structures form the solid platform that enables information to flow from families and communities to the state, and for the "right" services, funds and technical assistance to flow to communities and families. Together the state and local communities use data and accountability measures to improve services in response to changing needs and evolving research, and to deliver services in a cohesive, rather than fragmented, way. The rubber hits the road at the point where children are served. An effective, sufficient early learning system must be solidly in place at all levels, from the state to local communities to families and to children.

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<sup>1</sup> Owner at Karen W. Ponder, Inc., former President of Smart Start and BUILD's Washington State Technical Assistance Liaison

When state and community leaders collectively develop a vision for supporting the healthy development of young children, set a course together and employ strategies to achieve the vision, align their work and communicate regularly about local needs and assets, greater outcomes are achieved for young children and their families than either the state or local communities can do alone.

### Attributes of a Collaborative Leadership and Accountability Structure

In early learning, a collaborative leadership and accountability structure is an intentional way for states and communities to organize around the common purpose of assuring children’s success in school and life. The collaborative leadership model includes the following attributes:<sup>i</sup>

- Clear goals, guiding principles and values
- A state early learning plan that provides state and local leaders with a clear strategic direction and focus for the system
- Agreement on policy priorities and their budget implications
- Clearly articulated responsibilities and expectations of each partner
- Shared accountability for results
- Clear communication, transparency and a culture of innovation and continuous improvement among all partners at both the state and local level

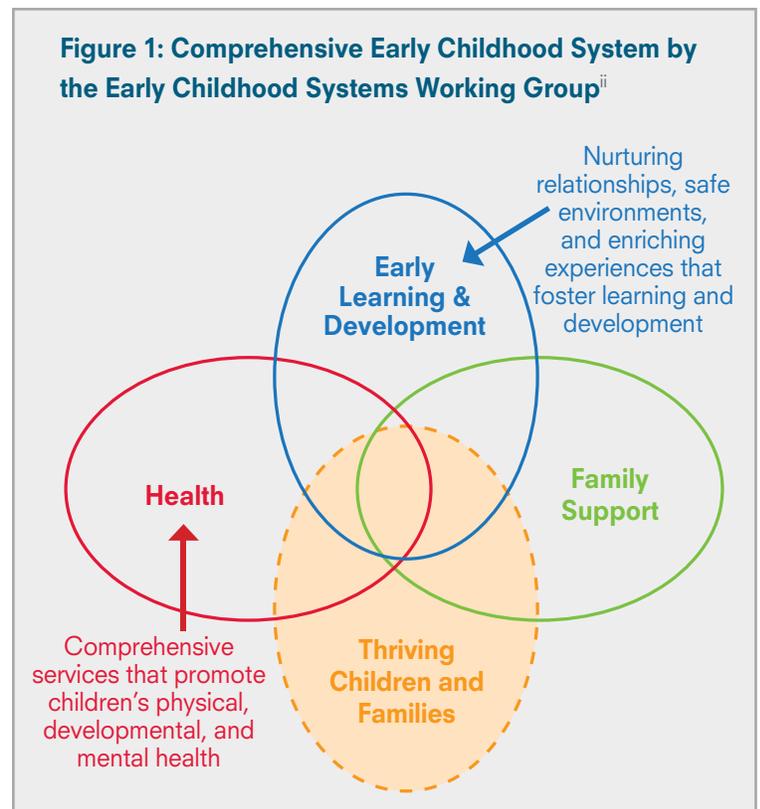
An effective approach to building a cohesive, high quality system must include children at all ages along the 0-8 continuum and must address the three areas that research indicates are critical to later success:

- Physical and mental health;
- Family stability; and
- Early learning.

### Putting the Pieces Together: Components of the Early Learning System

There is wide agreement across states about the components that are included in a comprehensive early learning system. All children need access to comprehensive and coordinated health services, quality early learning opportunities, services to meet special needs, and economic and family support. It is also widely understood that an early childhood system must be linked to K-12 so that children have a continuum of education from birth through twelfth grade, that early learning and K-12 standards are aligned and that appropriate transitions are included for all children.

**Figure 1: Comprehensive Early Childhood System by the Early Childhood Systems Working Group<sup>ii</sup>**



*“When state and community leaders collectively develop a vision for supporting the healthy development of young children...greater outcomes are achieved for young children and their families...”*



## Benefits and Results of Early Childhood Collaborative Leadership in States and Communities

Eighteen states have now created some form of a collaborative leadership and accountability model. While there are variations in their age, governance, organizational structures, scope, and priorities, they were each formed in response to the following realities:

- Affecting school readiness requires comprehensive approaches and involvement throughout various sectors of the community, including early care and education, health, mental health, family support and parenting, and others;
- Multiple systems impact young children and their families;
- Multiple funding streams are in place, each with its own regulations and requirements;
- Individual variations and unique situations exist among children and families;
- Current services are both market-based and government financed; and
- The current situation lends itself to a lack of coordination as well as duplication of services and inefficiencies in service delivery.<sup>iii</sup>

Historically, individual programs, such as pre-K and Early Support for Infants and Toddlers with special needs, were created to respond to a particular need, each with its own unique eligibility requirements, standards, funding sources and policy guidelines. And when a different need arose, the process was repeated. Over time a labyrinth of discrete programs developed, leaving children and families to navigate a landscape of varying and even conflicting standards and regulations, inconsistent quality and accountability, and often times disputed resources.<sup>iv</sup> In response to these conditions, a collaborative model of leadership and accountability was created in the early 90's, founded on the principle of collaboration across all programs and services, at the state, regional and community levels.

### States with Collaborative Leadership and Accountability Structures

Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia and Wyoming

The value of having communities involved in these efforts is clear. While policy and funding decisions are often made at the state level, their impact is felt directly in local communities. Young children live in communities and their needs are best known by their families and the organizations that work with them. The importance of community involvement and input is underscored in Shonkoff and Phillips' work where they cite "a belief that community and neighborhood conditions are important determinants of children's experiences and opportunities, and hence, life chances"<sup>v</sup> (p. 328). Having a clear understanding of these conditions and experiences is the first step in solving problems and getting better results. Partnering with communities in a collaborative leadership model is one of the most effective ways for states to support children and achieve better outcomes for the funding they provide.

States that have engaged in a collaborative model over a period of years, report significant outcomes and measure them at the systems level, the program level, and the child level as described below.

## Improving Outcomes for Children

There are three types of “outcomes” involved in creating the systems and services that support children’s healthy development and learning. These include outcomes of the system itself (how well is the system designed to bring together the programs and services for children in a cohesive way using population data for decision making?); the outcomes of individual programs and services (how are individual programs being implemented, what is their level of quality and how are they performing to meet the needs of children?); and outcomes of individual children (how is each individual child doing over time?). In writing about system outcomes, Scott Raun of Colorado writes that “A developing system is a dynamic blend of vision, resources, communication, engagement, and capacity that occurs at various intensities along a continuum of development.”<sup>vi</sup> Measuring outcomes at only one level of the system is inadequate to understand and improve the overall system of programs and services and to make sure that every child is achieving the best outcomes possible.

## Early Learning System Outcomes

According to Coffman in *A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives*,<sup>vii</sup> systems initiatives are organized efforts to improve a system and its impacts and can be publicly or privately funded. Systems initiatives are best understood by their focus or by the areas of the system they are trying to improve. Specifically, a systems initiative might focus on improving one or more of these five areas:

**Context** —improving the political environment that surrounds the system so it produces the policy and funding changes needed to create and sustain it.

**Components** —establishing high-performing programs and services within the system that produce results for system beneficiaries.

**Connections** —creating strong and effective linkages across system components that further improve results for system beneficiaries.

**Infrastructure** —developing the ongoing supports systems needed to function effectively and with quality.

**Scale** —ensuring a comprehensive system is available to all intended beneficiaries to produce broad and inclusive results for system beneficiaries.

Coffman’s research also suggests that systems initiatives do not have to focus on all five areas, listed above, although most focus on several areas simultaneously. And they do not typically place an equal emphasis on all focus areas at once. Some areas receive more attention than others at any given point in time, depending on where the system’s needs are greatest and the political or financial opportunities that are available.

## Examples of System Outcomes

Examples of specific systems outcomes include the *engagement* of multiple groups, organizations and individuals to understand and respond to the needs of children; *gathering resources* from public and private sources to assure sustainability; *alignment* of policies and standards across all programs; creating better informed and more effective *policies*; and building *greater knowledge and understanding among the public*, resulting in stronger advocacy for the needs of children and families.

A good example of a state that is achieving these system outcomes is Colorado where state management and oversight of early childhood programs and services are accomplished through a team from three state agencies (Health Services, Education, Public Health/ Environments) and their work is informed by the Early Childhood Regional Councils. Scott Raun, Director of Quality Initiatives in Colorado’s Division



of Child Care, who has years of experience in collaborative systems building, suggests that systems development also requires increasing formalization (deliberate and intentional processes) to ensure both transparency to stakeholders and accountability for the system itself. Elements that he suggests should be formalized include the organizational structure, decision-making and planning processes, implementation and evaluation. He also suggests that formalization not create structures or processes that duplicate existing services nor compete with existing stakeholder organizations for resources.<sup>viii</sup>

Through the work of Arizona's First Things First, a collaborative leadership model with a regional focus, a task force of home visitation partners was convened and collectively defined a joint home visitation agenda for the state. They are now piloting the creation of a unique portal of entry for all calls from families to one site where families can be matched to the services that best meet the needs of the families and their children. This "one-stop" approach helps to assure that families and children are provided the services that match the intensity of their needs and keeps families from having to shop around for needed services.

Colorado has a coordinated approach to local systems assessment, strategic planning and evaluation via a cross-organization management group. This has resulted in an additional \$0.56 in additional funding being generated from other sources at the local level for every \$1.00 invested in early childhood services by the state collaborative partners. In addition their coordinated data collection system now includes local systems data and program-specific information about discrete local programs.

Collaborative leadership helped North Carolina move the needle on higher quality by setting a goal that all children receiving subsidies will be served in the state's highest rated early childhood settings. Now almost 80% are served in 4 and 5-star rated programs, an increase from 20% in about 10 years.

### **Early Learning Program Outcomes**

Children have varying skills, abilities and needs, and programs should be designed with these variations in mind. Programs include early learning programs in all settings, including child care, Head Start and Pre-K. Other programs focus on the greater needs of children and their families such as home visiting programs or health programs. All early childhood programs should be developmentally appropriate to the ages and stages of young children and should be led by individuals who have deep knowledge about how children think and learn and how to best meet their individual needs.

### **Examples of Program Outcomes**

Some examples of program outcomes are: more effective outreach to families; providing families with better access to needed services; and implementation of research-based strategies that have proven results. There is no single magic approach to making this happen. States usually find it necessary to increase program quality across a range of programs before child outcomes can be improved and often it is the first priority and program outcome of their collaborative work.

Colorado, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina have research based studies that demonstrate the program impacts of their collaborative model. For example, in NC, numerous studies show that children enter school with better math and language skills because of Smart Start's wide range of program strategies and activities. The Governor and state education leaders now point to Smart Start as having the greatest influence on the state's end of third grade and end of fifth grade test scores, which are among the most improved in the nation.

Oklahoma has led the nation for seven consecutive years in enrolling the highest percentage of four year olds in state funded programs. During the 2009-1010 school year, 99% of their school districts provided pre-K classrooms and 84% of all their 4 year olds were enrolled in pre-K or Head Start programs. Having local collaboratives enables them to find hard-to-reach families and enroll their children in pre-K and Head Start.

### Child Outcomes

Child outcomes are indeed the ultimate goal that drives all systems building work. After a strong early learning system is created with accountability built into its design and high quality programs are in place to meet the individual needs of children, child outcomes must also be measured and tracked. Child outcomes should include a wide range of indicators that children are improving their knowledge and skills in all areas of development. Child outcomes are measured by developmentally appropriate research-based assessment instruments as well as pre- and post- scores on valid readiness instruments.

The Pennsylvania model is a state-driven collaborative model and has achieved large gains in child outcomes by working closely with regional collaboratives in all intermediate school districts of the state. For example, in their Pre-K program, which was implemented in cooperation with and with support from the regional collaboratives, 97% of the children in the program showed age-appropriate or

emerging age-appropriate language, math and social skills at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Two in three children who participated in their Keystone STARS program demonstrated age-appropriate language, math and social skills after attending the program, as compared to their beginning of the year assessments, which demonstrated that only one in three children had age-appropriate skills.<sup>ix</sup> The collaboration between schools and communities in PA assisted the state in identifying hard-to-reach families and enrolling their children in the Pre-K program and was a key factor in the state's ability to achieve significant results over a short period of time.

### Setting a Collective Vision and Planning an Infrastructure of Support

Creating a comprehensive early childhood system in which the state works together with local or regional coalitions to achieve outcomes for children and families requires careful planning, problem-solving, action and use of data for continuous improvement. Setting a collective vision is the first step in the process. Because there are numerous needs and challenges, creating a vision together (at the state and local/regional levels) and prioritizing the ways to achieve the vision are essential. According to Common Vision, the most successful states found that stakeholders shared a clear, long-term vision, set goals together and developed core principles regarding a high quality, comprehensive system. Stakeholders in those states reported that a shared vision, together with strong leadership and relationships, support and sustain the collaboration even in the face of policy differences, funding constraints and political setbacks.<sup>x</sup>

Once the vision has been agreed upon at both the state and local/regional levels, in order to work in a coordinated way and achieve the greatest results, statewide infrastructure is needed that includes these elements:

- Authority and leadership to develop the early childhood system;



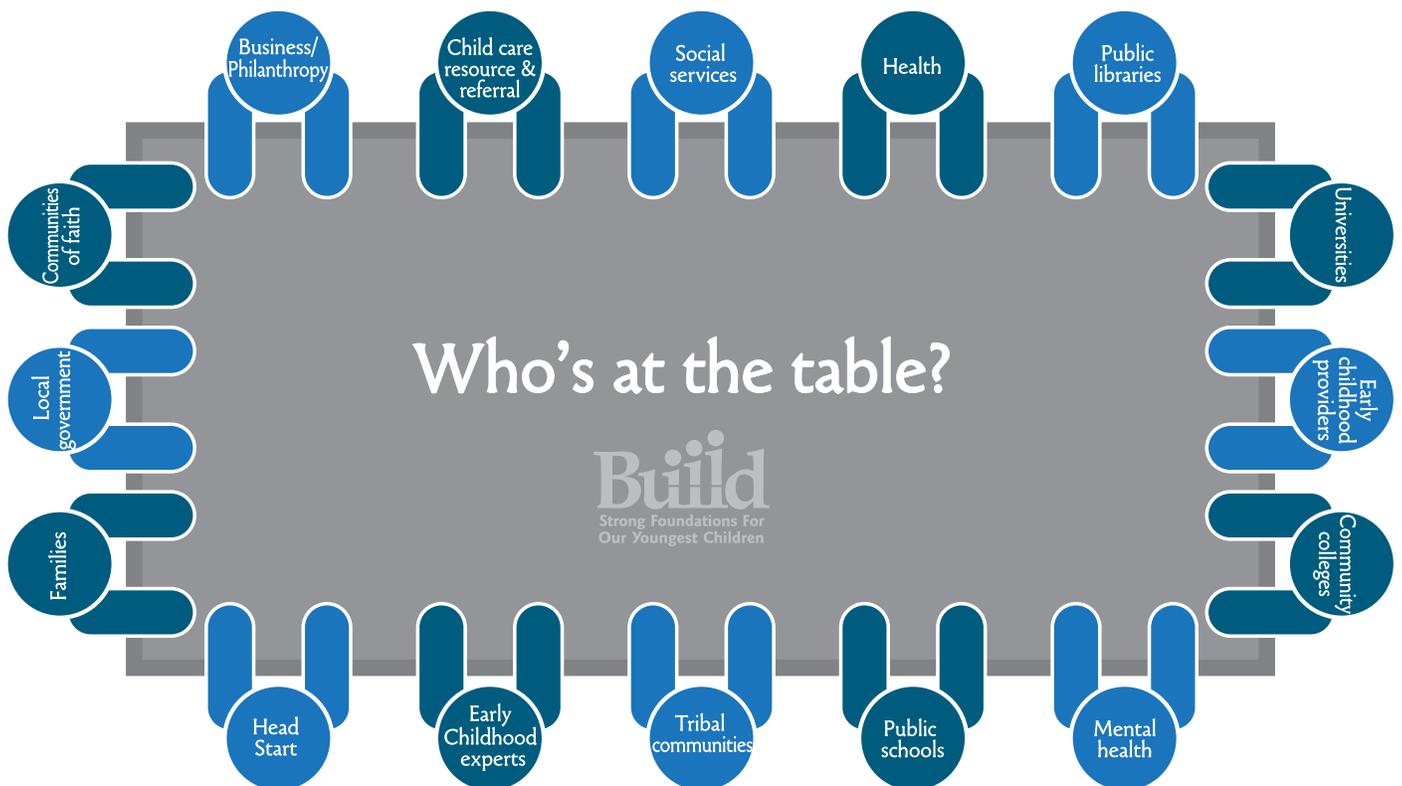
- Standards to ensure and support evidence-based practices and programs, to inform practitioners and to guide how services are provided;
- Monitoring to track program performance and results based on the standards;
- Ongoing professional development for the workforce and technical assistance to improve the quality of services;
- A mechanism to help families find and access services;
- Sufficient financing to assure comprehensive, quality services; and
- Communications to build public awareness and public will.<sup>xi</sup>

## Membership

Membership of the local/regional council leadership and accountability council is an important factor in achieving the strongest impacts. These leadership groups should include needed expertise, public and private sector leaders and reflect the diversity of the population—ethnically, racially, culturally, etc. They should include families, parents and representation from special populations and needs. They should work diligently to ensure cultural competence in planning, practice and accountability.

Different constituents have different purposes and roles to play—a simple but important idea. Business leaders, for example, are important voices in changing public policy and garnering resources for children. They need to be part of the state and local conversations and fully grounded in the science of early childhood education. In Arizona, knowledgeable and passionate business leaders led the state to pass a ballot initiative that garnered significant funding for young children.

States involved in the collaborative model over a period of years recommend that individuals representing the following groups should be included either on the governing council or in



working committees at both the state and local levels: parents/families, business and philanthropy, communities of faith, government, early childhood experts, public schools, tribal communities, community colleges, universities, early childhood providers, Head Start, health, mental health, social services, public libraries, and child care resource & referral. Having diverse expertise and representation from communities helps to garner a broader understanding of the issues and assures stronger accountability to the state and communities.

### State and Local Roles In Collaborative Leadership and Accountability Structures

States and communities have different roles to play in a collaborative leadership and accountability structure and the results are mutually beneficial to each, with significant benefits to children and families. Local communities are closest to families and have the most direct avenues to assess the needs of children and their families and make them known to the state. At the state level, population data can be used to make decisions about the allocation of resources, including the areas of greatest needs and how best to support local communities. Following are some examples of the roles that are typically played by states and communities that are drawn from a Building Bright Futures summit in Vermont:

#### Assessment of needs

- **Community role-** to assess the community for needs and assets of children, families and services and the resources that support them
- **State role-** to develop statewide needs and assets mapping, based on input from communities

#### Goals and strategies

- **Community role-** to develop local strategies to meet statewide and local goals
- **State role-** to set statewide goals with input from communities and to implement statewide system components for statewide benefit

### Standards and Guidelines

- **Community role-** to assure that all early learning programs and settings have access to state standards and guidelines and develop training opportunities and other supports so that teachers are guided by the standards in their education and practice
- **State role-** to set early learning guidelines, teacher education standards and program standards for statewide programs that are aligned to the state's K-12 standards

### Accountability for Outcomes

- **Community role-** to monitor local programs and funding, monitor, evaluate and revise strategies and report outcomes to the state
- **State role-** to account for funding and outcomes, monitor grantees and report statewide results

### Education and awareness

- **Community role-** to educate stakeholders and the public about the needs of young children and their families in order to leverage and increase investments in early learning
- **State role-** to educate stakeholders, policy makers and the public about the needs of young children and their families

### Leveraging and Increasing Investments

- **Community role-** to raise local funds, to coordinate funding to improve the continuum of services for children and families, and to align local funding with the State Early Learning Plan
- **State role-** to coordinate efforts to align and increase state and federal funding

### Accountability Systems: Their Importance and Functions

Accountability for child outcomes, program results and for all private and public funding dedicated to meeting the needs of children is everyone's task in a collaborative leadership and accountability model. States have discovered that accountability systems should be built into the design of the model. Some



states delayed putting accountability systems into place at the beginning and found it difficult to go back and change the system after it was moving forward.

**Fiscal accountability-** Fiscal accountability systems are vital to good functioning and are critical to keeping the public’s trust at both state and community levels. Community organizations that receive state funding must also demonstrate a proven track record of successful fiscal functioning and maintain high standards of accountability.

**Child Outcomes-** The most important area of accountability in the collaborative leadership and accountability model is direct outcomes for children. Two important questions must be answered, “Are the programs and strategies we’re engaging in improving the school readiness of children?” and “Are the children with the greatest needs being impacted?”

**Data Systems-** Systems that collect and report data and that align with Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) are in the process of development in many states and are critical components of the early childhood system. Pennsylvania has developed a data tracking system for all children served in their public programs. This system provides a way to measure the progress of each child and provides specific data for parents, for teachers, for programs, for state and local administrators, and for legislators and other policy makers.

North Carolina’s accountability system includes community standards, a way to hold communities accountable for results for children based on their collaborative leadership by measuring their progress over time. These standards answer the questions, “Are our programs and strategies strong enough to lead to better child outcomes” and “Are we improving our system over time?” The Performance-Based Incentive System (PBIS) measures and reports annually 25 specific outcomes on a county by county basis such as the percentage of children in 4 and 5 star-rated programs whose care is subsidized; the percentage of children who are identified early with developmental needs; and the percentage of kindergarten children who enter school with untreated tooth decay. Counties are expected to make progress on an annual basis and they are assisted when they don’t meet their minimum goals and rewarded when they exceed expectations. If counties do not achieve progress toward their goals within a specified period of time with the added technical assistance, the state can direct how the funding must be spent in order to achieve outcomes for children. This system measures the overall impact of Smart Start’s collaborative model; helps communities stay focused on results; and provides statewide and county data on improvements to the early childhood system over time.

## Steps and Stages In Building the Collaborative Leadership and Accountability Structure

States begin the process of organizing into a collaborative model from different places and with differing components of a system already in place. There are many variables that lead collaborative models to be more or less effective but Wiggins



found the following five factors rose to the top during her research in several states.<sup>xii</sup>

- **Representation/Legitimacy**—The BUILD/ SECPTAN 2004 report, *Building an Early Learning System: The ABCs of Planning and Governance Structures* suggested, “Ideally, a governance structure should be *representative*—involving those whose perspectives, talents, and positions are needed to make effective decisions, and *legitimate*—regarded as a fair and appropriate locus for decision making by those affected by the decisions made.” In a collaborative leadership and accountability model, good and effective governance, requires consideration of different interests to identify what is in the best interest of the whole system. It also requires taking into account the system’s historical, cultural, and social contexts.<sup>xiii</sup>
- **Transparency**—Transparency means that rules and regulations are followed when decisions are made and enforced. It also means that information is freely available, accessible, and understandable to those who are affected by those decisions.
- **Data**—Particularly in the domains of efficiency and accountability, being effective requires data. Data should focus on the system itself, as well as the children and families it serves.
- **Plurality of Leadership**—Leadership must exist and be fostered at different levels, including among mid-level managers and at the local level.

“*Ideally, a governance structure should be representative— involving those whose perspectives, talents, and positions are needed to make effective decisions...*”

- **Bureaucratic Expertise**—Because a lot of what governance does involves problem solving and trying to eliminate barriers, the presence of, or access to, bureaucratic expertise, particularly for governance leaders, can greatly facilitate the ability of governance to get things done.

While the stages of development will differ and move at differing paces, based on state and local realities, the following are general stages of development and parts of them may be happening simultaneously or moving back and forth among the stages, given current work and opportunities.

### Stage One: Planning Stage

The first stage in building a collaborative leadership and accountability structure is assessing the needs and resources within communities and developing a joint plan for how the state and local communities will work together to meet those needs and improve the outcomes for children and families. This stage involves bringing together multiple systems, partners and sectors of the community and is characterized as a loosely structured phase, making use of a variety of task forces and collaboratives to help understand the needs assets and develop a strategic plan. Decisions must be made about accountability at the state and community levels; how data will be collected and reported; how to define the local organizational structure needed to accomplish the overall vision and goals; the structure of the formal relationship and functioning structure between the community and state. Creating the membership for the local governing structure is also a key decision during this stage.<sup>xiv</sup>

### Stage Two- Implementation Stage

The implementation stage is characterized as action-oriented at both the state and local or regional levels. It is the actual creation of the leadership entities (board, council, advisory group, etc.) and the development of strategies to carry out the strategic plan with new and/or re-assigned resources. Sub-



systems to ensure accountability must be put in place. Local governance models vary across states. Some have a collaborative local council with governing authority. Some have created public-private partnerships. Others have assigned responsibilities to one or more existing agencies. Some have dedicated staff for coordination and programming. Others rely completely on volunteers.

One of the most critical elements in the implementation stage is that the system and all its sub-systems must be carefully coordinated so that together they form a seamless, coordinated and comprehensive system. Sound, well planned structures at all levels of the system will foster the kinds of joint work that is needed to move the system forward to achieve the best outcomes for young children.

### **Stage Three- Maintenance and Sustaining**

During stage three, the state and communities work together to align and coordinate improved and seamless services; monitor for continuous improvement and make needed adjustments; and expand the infrastructure, resources and accountability systems as needed. Whatever organizational structure is chosen, it is important for the entity, at a minimum, to have authority to tailor strategies to local needs, make recommendations about policy and resources and to have in place mechanisms to hold partners and programs accountable.

### **Lessons Learned in Collaborative Leadership Models •••**

States that have been involved in the pioneering work of collaborative leadership have learned many lessons through the development and revisions of their work. Following are some of the lessons shared by those states:

#### **Communication among and between the state and regions**

- Formalize communication mechanisms needed to keep the communications intentional and moving in many directions (state level, local/regional level, state to local/regional, local/regional to state, etc.); these may include memorandums of understanding, written policies, web sites, regular meetings, and conference calls;
- Develop mutual respect and deep relationships among partners and between the state and communities; clear communications is often pointed to as key to the success of building strong relationships
- Opportunities for learning and sharing need to be built into the design so that those processes are ongoing

#### **Preventing and mediating conflict**

- Formalize and institutionalize key processes<sup>xv</sup>
- Create an ongoing, regular method for communicating and working together that is known by and accessible to all partners
- Create a working environment where everyone can be heard
- Employ a consensus approach to making final decisions



## Public engagement and messaging

- Create a partisan-neutral cause and build relationships on both sides of the aisle to increase the likelihood that your work will be sustained<sup>xvi</sup>
- Create messages about children that connect to a wide range of the public.
- Use data to show value; data and evaluation information can demonstrate the value of your work and foster the support of the public and state and local leaders
- Both strong grassroots (community) and “grass tops” (state level) education and outreach networks are essential
- Develop a brand and logo early in the process to foster brand recognition of the early childhood collaborative for stakeholders and the public
- Develop specific strategies for families to educate them about the importance of the early years and the work of the collaborative

## Leadership

- Be strategic about filling gaps in leadership<sup>xvii</sup>; take the time to assess the needs and match them with the skills needed to get the work done
- Continuity of leadership matters; systems development occurs over time and needs leaders who keep the focus on moving the early childhood agenda along (MI paper)
- Build diverse leadership in multiple places<sup>xviii</sup>; and at different levels; remember that different kinds of leadership serve different functions both inside and outside of government and are needed for sustainability
- Engage leaders who have the ability to form and maintain strong working relationships; states found that this requires an ongoing commitment to communication, inclusiveness, cooperation and consensus<sup>xix</sup>
- Nurture leadership at all levels in a deliberate way.

## Collaboration

- Collaboration in the Collaborative Leadership and Accountability Model is a means to an

end, not an end in itself; focus on the objective of outcomes for children, not on protecting organizations nor individuals

- Those with the power to make decisions must be at the collaborative table; it is a waste of time and energy to try to make important decisions without decision-makers present who agree and will support the decisions
- Everyone in the collaboration has to benefit from the work together, in order for the collaboration to be successful

## Other Advice

- While focusing on clearly defined goals within the larger shared vision, be flexible enough to capitalize on political, fiscal and systemic opportunities that may come along.
- Be clear about where the decision-making authority lies at the state and in communities; there should be decision-making authority at both levels but it is extremely important for both levels to have a full understanding about what those decision points are and who makes them.

## Conclusion ●●●

Early childhood systems were hardly considered by state leaders 20 years ago and collaborative leadership and accountability were nonexistent. Now they are embedded into the education infrastructure in many states. While progress seems slow, significant milestones have been reached and as states and communities organize to work together toward the same ends, significant outcomes are achieved that were not imagined previously.

When North Carolina set a statewide goal to improve the quality of early learning in all settings, less than 20% of those settings had a level of quality that was high enough to meet the developmental needs of young children. After the state and local communities made this a high priority and worked together to improve this statistic, almost 80% of all



child care, Head Start and pre-K programs achieved a 3, 4 or 5 star rating, indicating a significantly higher level of quality.

Many barriers still exist that impede the progress in states that are building early childhood systems. These are complex and include: categorical funding streams; resistance to interference in families; the belief by some that school readiness begins at kindergarten; an overall resistance to change; conflicts over funding; and the complexity of interaction of sectors and domains. While each of these has to be considered and overcome, the value of the collaborative leadership model continues to help states achieve significant goals for young children and their families. The nation's leading states in building systems – Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and others – would not be where they are today without taking advantage of the state and local energy that is both nurtured and harnessed through collaborative leadership and accountability.

**Research Identifies Eight Key Levers for Creating Impact-** In a recent evaluation of Michigan's collaborative work, Michigan State University researchers reported that eight key levers emerged as having the most impact on building effective collaboratives. They were active involvement, shared goals, effective partnerships, strong parent voice and leadership, readiness for change, organizational commitment to the collaborative work, actively pursuing system change and strong networks. While they were all deemed to be important, organizational and community readiness for change emerged as the most important in impacting the overall goal of all children being healthy, safe and ready to succeed in school and in life.<sup>xx</sup>

The goal of collaborative leadership is to create a comprehensive statewide early childhood system that builds on what communities already have in place and facilitates the state and communities working jointly to get the best outcomes for all children. While this requires a great amount of leadership, hard work, cooperation, communication and problem-solving, the evidence points to a collaborative leadership model as the most promising approach to creating an early childhood system that assures that all children in all families, in all communities, arrive at school fully prepared to succeed in school and life.

*“...the value of the collaborative leadership model continues to help states achieve significant goals for young children and their families.”*

## Endnotes ●●●

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- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xii</sup> Wiggins, K. (2009). Key Findings Outside Pennsylvania. BUILD Initiative.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bruner, C., Stover Wright, M., Gebhard, B., & Hibbard, S. (2004). Building an Early Learning System: The ABCs of Planning and Governance Structures. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network and BUILD Initiative.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Anderson, L. & Clifford, Dean. (2009) Charts developed from writings and analyses of information about early childhood systems building from a variety of sources, including The ABC's of Early Childhood: Trends, Information, and Evidence for Use in Developing an Early Childhood System of Care and Education, Goldberg, Jason A.; Bruner, Charles; Kot, Veronika and State Human Services Organization, Chapters 4 and 5.
- <sup>xv</sup> Wiggins, K. Op. Cit.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xix</sup> Doctors, J., et al. Op. cit.
- <sup>xx</sup> Foster-Fishman, Collins, Reyes-Gastleum, & Chen. (2011). Evaluation Report. Michigan State University.



## APPENDIX: Collaborative Structures ●●●

State	State Structure	Local Structure	Funding Sources	Governance Functions
<b>Arizona</b> First Things First 2006	Quasi-Government First Things First Board	Regional Coalitions Statewide	State and private Tobacco tax	Governs early childhood system; advises Governor; Serves as ECAC
<b>Colorado</b> Early Childhood CO 1997	State Agencies	Local EC Councils Statewide	Federal, local and private	Makes early childhood policy; advises Governor and Legislature
<b>North Carolina</b> Smart Start 1993	Smart Start Nonprofit Board/Partners with state agencies	Local Partnerships Statewide	State and private	Advises Governor and Legislature; makes funding decisions
<b>Oklahoma</b> Smart Start Oklahoma 2003	OK Smart Start Nonprofit Board Partners with state	18 Local Coalitions	Federal, state, and private	Makes early childhood policy; advises Governor Serves as ECAC
<b>Pennsylvania</b> LEARN 2006	State agencies	Regional Coalitions	Federal, state and private	Provides input to Governor and Legislature
<b>South Carolina</b> First Steps 2001	Quasi- Government First Steps Board	Local Coalitions Statewide	Federal, state and private	Advises Governor; makes early learning policy Serves as ECAC
<b>Virginia</b> Smart Beginnings 2006	State Agencies EC Foundation	Regional Coalitions Statewide	Federal, state and private	Allocates funding to improve outcomes