



State Early Childhood Policy
Technical Assistance Network



The Build Initiative

Beyond Parallel Play: Emerging State and Community Planning Roles in Building Early Learning Systems

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Chapter One

Building Connections: Experiences in State-Community Partnerships in Building Early Learning Systems

by Charles Bruner, Julia Coffman, and Michelle Stover Wright

What is the role for community planning, decision-making, resource allocation, and ongoing administration and quality insurance in developing early learning systems?

How should these community roles intersect with state-level planning and governance systems and their roles?

These are the ultimate questions that this survey of six states sought to answer. The six states selected for this survey all have taken a lead in developing both state and community level planning structures for early learning systems development. While many states have developed state-level planning and governance structures for early learning (see insert), these six states have been leaders in intentionally supporting and developing community ones, as well.

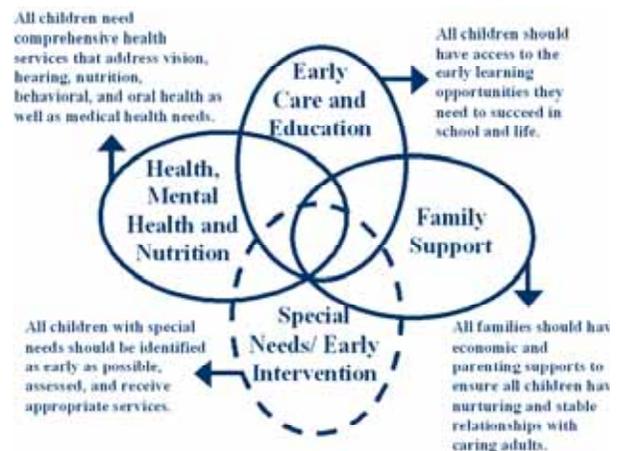
These six states—Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Vermont—are diverse both in their political cultures and their approaches to developing state and community governance structures for their early learning system building work.

For instance, North Carolina began its efforts as Smart Start in 1993 with 12 local partnerships and has expanded since that time to be a network of 82 partnerships covering the full state and administering over \$200 million in public funds through the partnerships. Meanwhile, Oklahoma’s statewide Partnership for School Readiness was established in 2003 and charged with coordinating state and local programming

The State Context

A growing number of states have developed cross-agency planning and governance structures to focus upon developing more coordinated and effective early learning systems that better achieve the goal that “all children start school ready to learn.”¹ With Build’s involvement and leadership, an array of organizations providing technical assistance to these state systems building efforts have developed a common framework for defining that early learning system. This framework is cross-disciplinary and incorporates early care and education; family support; health, mental health, and nutrition; and services for children with special needs (see diagram, below). It also applies to the community level planning and governance structures described here.

State Early Childhood Development System²



and currently provides \$2 million in small grants to support twelve local sites in planning and taking strategic action. Three of the states (Colorado, Minnesota, and Vermont) surveyed are much closer to Oklahoma than to North Carolina in the

duration, size, and extent of the investments under community direction, while Iowa is more like North Carolina in its duration and level of investment through community.

The purpose of this survey and report, however, is not to focus upon these differences and compare and contrast the impacts of their different approaches.³ Instead, it is to:

- identify some of the underlying, common motivating factors for taking such action that exist across these diverse states;
- characterize the different types of actions and positive results that community planning and governance has produced;
- offer “lessons learned” from these experiences that are applicable to other states pursuing such approaches; and
- highlight challenges and ongoing community learning activities that deserve special attention in further developing these structures.

In each state, leaders at both the state and community levels were interviewed according to a common protocol. Individual state reports (chapter two) describe in more depth the state and community experiences in each of the states.

Diverse Approaches with Underlying, Common Motivating Factors

In the course of the surveys, state and community leaders in all states described a number of reasons for establishing community-level planning and governance structures. Generally, leaders did not provide an overarching master plan for developing community planning and

governance structures, but saw them as part of a more organic and evolving process toward building an early learning system. In short, there were no developed or full answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this report. At the same time, there were several important common motivating factors expressed for the value of community, as well as state, planning structures:

- *The need to develop more coordinated or integrated local service delivery across health, early care and education, education, and other service systems.* Leaders spoke of the fragmentation of services and the current funding systems that created different “silos” that often are hard to navigate by families and their young children. This fragmentation was commonly perceived as leading to duplication of services, particularly around assessment and intake activities and case management or care coordination for more vulnerable children and their families. Most leaders felt that designing more coordinated and integrated service delivery could not be achieved by state action alone, but at a minimum level required community-level planning and action to develop more effective models for coordination and integration of services.
- *The need to establish joint commitment and responsibility to achieving better results for children across all stakeholders.* State and community leaders generally believed that building early learning systems required shared responsibility and accountability across existing service systems – early care and education, health, human services, and the K-12 educational system – and new

planning and governance structures were needed to create this joint responsibility and accountability. This logic applied equally to the state and the community levels. As states built their own cross-system planning and governance systems, they recognized the value for corresponding local systems. There was a general belief that this joint responsibility and accountability required a structure that did not give undue power to one aspect of that system, such as public education or early care and education, which vesting within an existing department could produce.

- *The potential for developing early learning systems that are contoured to address the unique needs, cultures, and strengths of local communities.* Leaders often indicated that a “one size fits all” state approach was unlikely to work, as it failed to reflect the very different needs, cultures, and assets of local communities. This argument, of course, could be used for “devolving” authority to the community level for any policy or service. As applied to early learning, however, leaders spoke of the particularly local nature of many services for young children and their families and the already very different constellation of such services and supports that must be coordinated in one community contrasted with another. Most often cited as community differences that needed to be respected and addressed were differences between urban and rural communities.⁴
- *The opportunity to bring in new constituencies and enhance citizen involvement.* At two levels, leaders saw the opportunity – particularly at the

community level – to enlist additional stakeholders needed to develop early learning systems that would produce better results for young children. First, parents and voluntary community support systems (faith institutions, civic groups and organizations, and other support networks) could assist in the design of new systems, but they also make community contributions that support young children in their development and strengthens families in their primary nurturing role. Second, business and other community leaders could provide additional impetus and support for leveraging new investments and holding systems accountable for their roles.

- *The need to develop new models and strategies, while building upon what works.* Finally, leaders recognized that the state did not have all the answers to building a stronger early learning system.⁵ On-the-ground, community testing of new ideas was seen as a necessary component for developing new models and strategies, with an emphasis upon that community activity guided by evidence regarding “research-based” or “promising” programs. Organically, leaders also saw it important to tie this testing back to state-level planning and governance, to inform state policy and practice.

Again, it is important to stress the organic nature of this work and the general motivating factors behind it. There was not a master plan or blueprint delineating specific roles and accountability between state and community upon which to judge or measure success. While not necessarily explicit in legislative authorization or organizational

mission, as these efforts do evolve, these issues of state and local roles deserve to be returned to as these states are assessed for their progress.

Accomplishments

Consistent with the underlying motivating factors and the organic nature of the work, the measure of success for these efforts cannot be assessed in terms of achieving some end state of governance or optimal child outcomes, but rather in demonstrating positive results along a broad range of possible actions.⁶

Leaders at both the state and community level in all states cited a number of different positive impacts from their work. This included both concrete program improvements with implications for improvements in child development (often from new demonstration program or project funding) and more general improvements in public and system understanding and capacity to build early learning systems.

The beneficial impact of these community-level planning and governance structures is described in the box below.

Community experiences from the six states show that communities can make contributions in each of these areas, although different communities and different states have taken different actions. Even in the most mature state-community partnerships, communities are still developing their roles in these areas. Each of the nine roles is discussed below, with selected accomplishments by states and communities.

1. *Administering and making decisions that are best made at the local level, including the consolidation of funding streams but also better collaboration across systems.* One of the most frequently cited goals for establishing community governance structures is to consolidate or better integrate funding streams to eliminate service silos and provide less fragmented services. Under

Preliminary Map of Community Early Learning Planning and Governance Structure Roles

1. Administering and making decisions that are best made at the local level, including the consolidation of funding streams but also better collaboration across systems.
2. Contouring overall services to better meet unique local needs and political cultures.
3. Drawing in voluntary support networks and systems to help young children and families get what they need to support early learning.
4. Creating local awareness of the importance of early learning, fostering community energy and changing the early learning culture.
5. Creating a grassroots and grassroots advocacy base for state-level reforms and investments.
6. Leveraging local resources to support aspects of the early learning agenda.
7. Providing guidance back to the state on how the state can effectively manage resources and ensure quality.
8. Serving as “laboratories” to test new ideas and aid in technology transfer across communities.
9. Addressing particular issues of diversity and cultural congruence.

such thinking, the state “devolves” some responsibilities for different funding streams to the community level, where that funding can be directed to the most appropriate areas, usually with a state accountability structure established “based upon results and not service delivery processes.”

In the six states studied, there have been varying but generally small degrees of redirection of existing state or federal funding and decision-making to communities. The “devolution” of funding decisions most often has involved newly created state funding, sometimes coupled with some redirection of some share of federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds. For several reasons, the actual consolidation of and “devolution” of decision-making over the major share of funding for early care and learning has not occurred. First, many of the most significant sources of funding for young children are federal – Medicaid and SCHIP funds, CCDBG funds, Title IV-E funds, IDEA Part B and Part C funds – and have significant requirements and restrictions on their use that must be negotiated with federal agencies (hard to do at the community level). Others – Head Start and Title I funding – involve federal to local funding that bypass state systems and themselves go through local administrative jurisdictions that are not county-based. Second, existing funds already are being used and have their own political constituencies as well as administrative processes that would need to be recreated if funding authority were redirected. Third, while it is conceptually possible to talk about establishing accountability based upon “results and not processes”, developing such an accountability system that also adheres to the regulations and requirements of the

individual funding streams has proved very illusory.⁷

In practice, most state funding to community planning and governance structures for actual early childhood services has been with new, generally flexible funds devoted to that purpose. Even in these instances, the funding often comes with some strings attached regarding use. Communities usually have been given planning authority to review other state and federal funding streams and make recommendations to the state for redirection or restructuring of that funding, but they have not been given direct control over them. In the handling of new funding, however, communities are expected to take into account other funding sources and deploy their funding to coordinate with existing services. Experiences from the communities suggest that this represents a significant “learning curve” at the community level. Even in the most mature efforts, like North Carolina and Iowa, communities often do not have a full picture of the array of programs and their attendant funding levels devoted to working with young children and their families.

Communities have had substantial successes in creating better coordination and collaboration across systems, however. These have not usually involved pooling of funds, but redirection of some of the work undertaken within those funds. School districts participating in local planning and governance structures have re-contoured their use of Title I funds to develop transition activities for young children coming to school. Part C services have developed stronger partnerships with child care providers in identifying and serving children with developmental delays. WIC programs have established new relationships

with family centers and Head Start programs to provide WIC counseling services on-site. At the frontline service level, community planning and governance structures often have served as a catalyst for increased cross-system coordination that makes it easier for families of young children to get what they need.

In North Carolina, local partnerships have concentrated system building on creating a solid infrastructure of services and consolidating and integrating different parts of the system. Typical examples include making child care affordable by consolidating child care subsidy funding through a single agency (e.g., child care resource and referral agencies); funding preschool through multiple funding streams (e.g., Head Start, Title I, Smart Start, state child care subsidies); improving access to child health, dental, and vision care by weaving together existing services and developing programs that fill in gaps; and co-locating services to improve access and provide “one-stop shopping.”

In Colorado, funding consolidation occurs at the local level through the blending and braiding of multiple federal, local, and private dollars. State and federal dollars like the Colorado Preschool Program and the Colorado Child Care Assistance subsidy funds are positively impacted by the local Pilots’ collaborative work and bringing together of representatives using those funds. Pilot partners work together to identify ways to use and leverage funding collaboratively so it reflects community needs and builds on systemic early childhood goals. For example, many Pilot communities braid Pilot funds, child care resource and referral dollars, and foundation grants to provide ratings and professional

development to child care centers and home providers in their communities.

In Vermont, Building Bright Futures is focusing more on redirecting existing funds than securing new dollars. The rationale is that while a need exists for new monies in the early childhood system as a whole, those dollars do not necessarily need to flow through Building Bright Futures for system building to occur.

2. *Contouring overall services to better meet unique local needs and cultures.*

Another very frequently cited reason for developing local governance structures is that localities differ and services need to be contoured to meet their unique needs and strengths. Rural areas have far fewer services and greater distances in getting children and families to services, without economies of scale to develop many services that exist in metropolitan areas. Meanwhile, metropolitan areas often have very different neighborhoods, with poor, immigrant, and minority neighborhoods facing their own challenges to receiving needed services, particularly those that are culturally congruent.

Experiences from the six states indicate that local planning and governance activities have been contoured to local geo-political units (generally counties), with rural efforts more likely to stress home-based early care and education alternatives and to consciously address issues of transportation.

In addition, some of the more general services and supports that young children and their families can benefit from (including family support, networking help, and case management or advocacy) often can be provided through a variety of state

service systems – public health, early care and education, human services, or education. Communities often are in the best position of determining the right locus for such activities – selecting the strongest and most collaborative partner at the community level to head up the activities. Communities in the six states have shown the ability to navigate the different local service systems and their providers to establish hubs for such activities.

The Iowa Community Empowerment Initiative was created to provide local control for systems building in early childhood-focused programming and work. Community empowerment areas were locally-determined and formed primarily along county lines, although some are multi-county. Multi-county areas are based primarily on past partnerships and collaborations among counties, as well as population size (rural counties have smaller populations, so multi-county partnerships allow more people to be served). Guidelines for how local sites can use community empowerment dollars exist in the areas of preschool tuition support, family support programming, and an administrative limit. But within those categories and beyond them there is flexibility on how the monies are disbursed. That flexibility allows sites to use funding in ways that are most appropriate for their sites. For example, sites use discretionary funding to support provider training and professional development, emergency child care, wrap-around child care, health fairs or other health supports, and child care conferences.

In North Carolina, Smart Start was established to emphasize local control and decision making. Because North Carolina's service delivery system is county-based,

local partnerships also are county-based. Smart Start emphasizes local decision making, with an emphasis on local flexibility. Local partnerships develop annual plans that dictate how Smart Start funds will be spent. Plans aim to create a system of services that builds on existing services and fills in gaps as needed.

3. Drawing in voluntary support networks and systems to help young children and families get what they need to support early learning. All families need support in helping to raise their children, but families with young children have particular needs for safe and supportive environments on a twenty-four hour basis. They have generally greater needs for respite and for opportunities to get together with others. Linking vulnerable and isolated families with voluntary support networks often is key to ensuring young child health and development. Families may be identified by public systems and receive professional services (counseling, case management, etc.), but they often still need connections with supporting networks to succeed. Drawing in and strengthening the capacity of such voluntary support networks ultimately must be done at the neighborhood and community – and not the state – level. While states can provide resources for such networks, supporting and sustaining them must be done locally.

Communities in the six states often have incorporated faith communities, local civic organizations, and parents on their planning and governance structures.

For example, at least 51 percent of Iowa's community empowerment boards must be citizens or elected officials, and boards must consist of consumers, members of the faith

and business communities, and representatives from human services, health, and education systems. Oklahoma Smart Start's local partnership boards and sites tend to have an open-door policy to attract a wide range of stakeholders from, for example, the public school system, social services, child care providers and licensing, libraries, business leaders, parents, and faith-based and other charitable organizations. Local sites create their own local by-laws regarding membership and day-to-day operations. Inclusion of partners from different sectors, including voluntary support networks, ensures they have different resources and limitations and therefore can offer different supports and commitments.

4. Creating local awareness of the importance of early learning, fostering community energy and changing the early learning culture. Research shows that there often is a declarative value in simply raising an issue or concern to public attention. This can unleash new activity to address the issue and a different community mindset that results in positive change independent from any new public program or service. Mothers Against Drunk Driving helped to change penalties and enforcement standards for driving while under the influence of alcohol, but they also changed the public's view of driving after drinking that has resulted in many fewer people engaging in that behavior. Communities often have raised the visibility and salience of early learning that has resulted in people incorporating new activities into their family and work lives. While state public education campaigns also can heighten such awareness, communities are more capable of producing grassroots actions.

In Vermont, Building Bright Futures is expected to provide a major boost to public awareness efforts about the importance of early learning and the services that are available. As the current system of services can be confusing to families, providers, legislators, and the general public, Building Bright Futures will give Vermont's early childhood service delivery system a recognizable name, identity, and common brand. The state council's public engagement committee will work with marketing experts to create messaging that can be used to raise public awareness at the state and local levels and to develop integrated communications planning.

In Minnesota, when new early childhood coalitions form, communities engage in an intensive coalition building process that is grounded in community organizing principles. The process builds relationships, often across individuals and organizations that do not regularly interact. It also increases community awareness about the importance of early childhood and the availability, or lack thereof, of services and coordination across those services.

5. Creating a grassroots and grassstops advocacy base for state-level reforms and investments. Building an early learning system does involve new investments in infrastructure, services, and service quality.⁸ A good share of this funding must come from the state and federal government, where the bulk of public funding is and where the responsibility for ensuring equal access to all children resides. Community governance structures, particularly as they engage and educate diverse and powerful constituencies at the grassroots and grassstops level, can produce a much stronger advocacy base for those state and federal

investments. It also often is much easier to produce nonpartisan advocacy at the community than at the state level.

In Minnesota, the statewide advocacy organization Ready 4 K works with local early childhood coalitions to build a groundswell of support and participation in state-level early childhood advocacy. Several years ago, Ready 4 K developed a five-year “Road Map to School Readiness” that establishes a vision for ensuring all young children in Minnesota enter Kindergarten ready to learn. The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative has greatly enhanced Ready 4 K’s capacity to engage community members in advocacy around the Road Map. Because early childhood coalitions are founded with a community organizing process, Ready 4 K has access to an already informed and engaged local-level constituency. Ready 4 K engages in two-way communication with the coalitions on its policy advocacy agenda, regularly soliciting input and providing regular policy updates and calls to action. Ready 4 K also educates local coalition members on core policy issues and provides advocacy training and tips for communicating with state legislators.

6. Leveraging local resources to support aspects of the early learning agenda. Outside some limited foundation support for particular initiatives, state governments rarely receive gifts or grants from the private sector (individual, corporate, or foundation givers). Most of this giving is local and personal in nature, often related to very tangible and physical things (e.g. buildings and capital campaigns). There are substantial needs in the early learning field for such funding support, but there often is not a recognized structure for matching

needs with funding opportunities. Community planning and governance structures can play a particular role in identifying the needs for specific community investments in early learning, including hubs or resource centers that support early learning activities, often with members who can raise such funding.

Oklahoma Smart Start requires its local sites to get a 10 percent community match to add to state funding, which can be in-kind or cash-based. This encourages local buy-in and most sites have little trouble meeting the 10 percent goal.

In Colorado, annual pilot community funding is not enough to fully address all community needs, and so additional money is raised locally through state or local grants, foundations, or other leveraging of resources. State-level staff, including a program director through the Colorado Department of Education and a state program manager who works directly with the pilot coordinators statewide, work with the Pilot councils to identify other funding sources so that all areas of need can be addressed.

The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative was launched with a three-year \$3.2 million grant from the McKnight Foundation. Since its inception, the regional Minnesota Initiative Foundations that oversee the Initiative and local coalitions have leveraged McKnight funding to generate several million dollars in additional support from local sources, including corporations and other foundations.

7. Providing guidance back to the state on how the state can effectively manage resources and ensure quality. The state sets

regulatory policy and parameters around its own and certain federal funding, which then must be administered at the local level. Some of these policies work well and others have unintended consequences or deserve additional contouring to meet local needs. Community governance structures can help to identify areas where state administrative rules and procedures can be modified to better achieve results. They can be particularly helpful in examining the interplay of different requirements across agencies and funding streams.

While this “rule busting” often has been seen as a major benefit to establishing community governance structures, the experiences of the six states has been that state regulations less often need to be changed or altered but instead interpreted or implemented more flexibly.

In Colorado, a unique waiver system provides for the flow of information to the state on needed changes to regulation and policy. Local pilots can petition the state for waivers to existing state rules and regulations that are barriers to achieving local results. Examples of waivers requested at the local level that have had an impact on state policy include the expansion of the Colorado State preschool program from 4- and 5-year-olds to 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds; raising the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) eligibility from 185 to 220% of poverty; and streamlining the application and other involved processes for securing CCAP dollars.

In North Carolina, the state’s 5-star child care licensing system has been successful because efforts to build quality began at the local level. Providers were not as intimidated when the state set higher quality

standards because they already were meeting them or thought they were attainable. Recently, North Carolina raised its quality standards again without conflict, because local partnerships had already helped child care centers meet the higher standards.

8. *Serving as “laboratories” to test new ideas and aid in technology transfer across communities.* Communities can explore and test new programs and ideas more quickly and cheaply than the state, taking advantage of local vitality. Where there is energy and expertise, lead communities can develop new or reformed services that then can serve as models for development by their peers. The diffusion of innovation literature suggests that there is a process for changing practice that starts with inventors and early adapters at the local level and proceeds to become conventional practice, through continued adoption in the field.⁹

Given that much of the funding provided to community structures has been flexible funds to develop new services, this is an area that has commanded substantial attention and action. Numerous examples exist of new services being developed to fill gaps and actions in one community being replicated or adapted in another. While some of this involves developing services and supports new to the particular community, most has involved adaptation of programs that have been developed previously, including a variety of home visiting and family support programs. Communities rarely have had the resources to truly “test” new models, particularly employing any research design that could assess their efficacy.

Oklahoma has a well-developed learning network that facilitates the diffusion of innovation. For example, the Raising a Reader program, based on the importance of reading to young children, supports parents through information and provision of high quality children's books that can be exchanged weekly for new ones. Initiated first at the state's Stillwater site, Raising a Reader was so successful that is now required for all Smart Start local sites.

In Minnesota, in 2004 the Department of Education partnered with 17 early childhood coalitions to select school districts for a pilot project that trained Kindergarten teachers to assess incoming students for school readiness.

9. *Addressing particular issues of diversity and cultural congruence.* Communities in all six states have substantial differences in race, culture, and language, with children generally leading the way in this diversity. Some communities have experienced dramatic changes in their make-up, due to immigration and inmigration, changes which produce new challenges to existing service systems. Developing culturally competent and congruent early learning systems is essential for success, and community governance structures can play a prominent role in developing these systems and strengthening community understanding of the importance of embracing this diversity.

At the same time, communities generally have been defined on a county geo-political basis, while geographic concentrations of minority and immigrant families usually are at much smaller, neighborhood levels. While community governance structures are in a position to address such issues, they also need to be concerted and intentional in

creating space and voice within their structures for representatives from these communities.

* * *

As the above discussion indicates, community planning and governance structures can have impacts and benefits in each of the nine areas. At the same time, there is a maturational process in developing such collaboratives, and they rarely start out with activities that can produce gains in more than a few specific areas. Ultimately, staffing and resources help determine how far they can go in realizing their full potential in all areas. Even the best funded and most mature community governance structures have not encompassed the full range of potential for impact that has been shown to be possible.

Lessons Learned

The experiences from these six states do not provide definitive answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this report regarding the specific state and community governance roles for an early learning system. They do, however, indicate that community planning and governance can contribute in substantial ways to developing an early learning system. The following are some "lessons learned" from these experiences that may be helpful as other states and communities take on this task.

Birth to five is an appropriate focus for community planning and governance. The scope of the work in developing an early learning system for very young children is very broad, but still manageable. In general, the early learning field represents a large but definable set of key stakeholders and a

unifying goal (that all children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed). There is growing consensus on the elements for achieving that goal, as expressed in the school readiness equation. The birth to five focus (in some instances birth to eight to cover the transition into school¹⁰) enables participants to establish a common direction for their work.

Some efforts to develop local governance structures have started with a broader focus of involving child and family services, covering families with children birth to eighteen. These greatly multiply the number of stakeholders (of necessity including the full range of K-12 services, juvenile justice and other youth services and programs, a much broader array of corrective mental health and substance abuse services, and often family welfare and economic self-sufficiency services) and involve multiple goals, which makes focus difficult and the “learning curve” at the community level much more substantial.

Community planning involves community learning and adaptation, as well as community ownership and a political constituency for continued state activity. Even the provision of relatively modest new resources and planning authority to communities can stimulate significant action and ownership at the community level. This can provide “permission” at the community level to try new things and, as importantly, to adapt and learn. Many of the gains made through local planning are at a very practical level in making programs work better or more smoothly together, with participants invested in this process rather than feeling they must carry out administrative orders from the state. This “empowerment” at the community level also can establish a

constituency for continuing state activity. Local political constituencies generally are less partisan or tied to specific state political leadership. State leaders have seen the value of such local governance structures as helping to maintain momentum in early learning systems building across changes in governors or partisan legislative make-up.

Community-level direction usually produces a variability of success across communities. Leadership is key to success and also requires staffing and the right type of staffing (collaborative leadership). One reason for state-level regulation is to ensure some consistency across the state and provide residents with certain rights to service, regardless of where they live. Local planning and governance results in local differences and variations. Some communities advance more quickly than others, and variability exists in planning and implementation across communities in all six states.

Recognized as a key to making advances in community governance by both state and community leaders interviewed was the provision of funding for staffing at the community level. In addition, selecting staff with the energy, inclination, and ability to work with others was seen as a key to success, particularly when coupled with local knowledge and credibility. This “collaborative leadership” style included attention to reaching out to and engaging diverse constituencies and connecting activities together. Community leaders also spoke of the value of having training and staff development opportunities for themselves that provided both substantive technical assistance on early learning and procedural technical assistance on managing a collaborative process.

Intentional peer-to-peer networking is valuable, but it is not often sufficiently resourced or supported at the state level. Community leaders cited ideas and help they received from peers as among the most valuable support they received in their work. This included contact at statewide or regional meetings and training sessions, but it also involved peer exchanges and matches that leaders constructed. Many ideas and actions were transferred across communities through peer-to-peer networking. State leaders also came to see the value in such networking over time, although it seldom was part of their original planning nor an intentional part of their own work plans. State leaders initially saw most of the idea exchanges and learning opportunities as between the state and individual communities, rather than across communities. Such networking often has taken time to develop and, in most states, could have been supported earlier at the state level. In many states, the peer-to-peer networking remains underutilized, because there are no resources available to make the connections that support it.

Incorporating “best practices” and “research-based” approaches into community planning requires an infrastructure that cannot be created solely at the community level. Increasingly, states have placed an emphasis upon the need to draw upon research in developing specific programs. State accountability systems are being based upon achieving results and community governance structures are being instructed to employ “research-based” programs or “best practice” principles as they develop their strategies and establish new programs or services. At the same time, there is a limitation on what most communities can achieve in developing their

strategies based upon the best available research, let alone securing the necessary tools and support to ensure fidelity in replicating or adapting research-based programs or best practices.¹¹ Even states often have difficulty with this task, as it takes a significant infrastructure to achieve (perhaps best embodied in the Frank Porter Graham Center in North Carolina). Further, while communities constantly innovate and adapt in their work, they seldom actually invent new approaches – nor subject their adaptations and innovations to the type of evaluation that can accurately test its effectiveness. The locus for evaluation and research that can truly build knowledge for the field and expand the base of “research-based” programs and “best practices” likely is at the state level or through public-private-foundation support.

There is value in providing substantial, ongoing communication platforms between state and community. Both state and community leaders emphasized the value of joint learning between state and community, with each providing valuable lessons for the other. While there is a variety of ongoing communication between individual community sites and the states and state communication to all sites, leaders stressed the value of developing regular, intentional meetings, forums, or workshops involving both state and community representatives that provided two-way communication. Building these into the overall state level design and structure helped produce greater communication and, over time, the relationships needed across state and community to have a learning community. In particular, state leaders, particularly mid-level managers, often benefit from having on-the-ground interaction at the community

level to help inform their own work in monitoring and managing programs.

Reducing “fragmentation” is usually not about consolidating funding or “rule busting,” but about recontouring the elements to be coordinated to better meet young child needs. In several states, enabling legislation made specific reference to the ability of communities to seek and secure waivers from state rules and regulations and to consolidate funds when needed to develop more integrated and effective services. In practice, however, communities have identified few specific state rules or regulations that prevent them from developing more coordinated services. Instead, they have found that they want to change existing state and community practices and uses of funding – which involves trade-offs or changes in personnel responsibilities or uses of funding that already are allowed under state and federal law. In fact, many funds available to states for early learning (Title I, TANF, CCDBG quality funds) already are quite flexible. The challenge is that they already are being deployed for certain purposes, and changing how they are deployed either involves changing staffing, staff roles and responsibilities, or ending support for specific programs or activities that have a constituency. Communities more often have been successful in recontouring existing funds through enlisting the support of the community leaders charged with administering those funds than in pooling or consolidating the funds that are then administered by the community governance structure. At the same time, the permission provided by the state to seek waivers or consolidate funds itself provides communities with the impetus to explore new approaches that has led to significant

recontouring of programming and funding at the community level.

Community ownership helps produce sustainability, particularly across changes in state political leadership. State and community leaders have found that building strong community governance structures and the ownership and investment that goes with it has multiple benefits. In particular, it creates a much stronger political base for sustaining activity across changes that may occur in state leadership. State-level programs that remain associated with a particular Governor and set of top state administrators are vulnerable when a new administration comes into power. State legislators look to their own districts in examining how well programs and initiatives are operating. Community ownership establishes a more enduring base of support than often is developed at the state level. Further, there often is great continuity in leadership at the community level, while term limits and turnover at the state level often result in much less institutional memory and commitment.

Complete devolution is not the answer – there is a role for state regulation and standards. As stated at the outset, the development of a state-community governance structure ultimately requires delineating roles and responsibilities for each. Completely community-administered systems inevitably will vary substantially in what they provide and do; and there are some variations that can result in services below a standard that the state should hold for all children and families served. Where a child resides should not determine whether the child receives essential services, supports, and opportunities. In addition, for reasons of economies of scale alone, states

often are in the best position to establish and enforce some standards and rights to service (often around eligibility and minimum quality). State and community leaders are sorting out these different roles and responsibilities, as they develop and evolve. This often has resulted in states developing new approaches (such as tiered rating and reimbursement systems) while allowing communities to augment or expand on them.

Issues of race and class and culture should be reflected in the composition of the governance structures to ensure that they receive attention. States are compilations of communities, and in all states, communities differ substantially in their racial, ethnic, and class make-up. Simply establishing community governance structures, however, particularly at a county geo-political unit designation, does not ensure that those structures will adequately reflect the race and ethnicity of the community or give voice to issues of race, class, and culture. State and community leaders both acknowledged that more needs to be done to provide this voice, recognizing this as both a challenge and an opportunity.

Challenges/Ongoing Learning Community Issues

Each of the six states and their communities are continuing to grow their state and community partnerships. This has been an organic, iterative, evolutionary process. As they continue to evolve, they also are helping to bring into sharper focus questions about state and community governance strategies for early learning that will be critical to learn from and address. The work in building community planning and governance structures has raised as well as answered questions. Getting better answers

to these questions will be helpful as other states develop intentional strategies for supporting community planning and governance. The following highlights several of the questions that examination of these six state efforts raised as next stage challenges and opportunities in building community governance structures.

How much flexible funding do communities need to establish and sustain a community planning process? State and community leaders were clear about the importance of providing staffing support to communities, but the amount of support provided varied across states, as did the amount of new or flexible funds available for services. Leaders also emphasized that money can get in the way of, as well as facilitate, community planning and governance work. No magic level of financial support exists that, in all instances, will foster community planning and governance, but there are levels of funding below which it is unlikely that such planning and governance will go forward quickly or be sustainable. If the goal is to develop a truly comprehensive community planning and governance structure, the costs for that structure need to be determined and paid.

How far does the systemic focus need to go? All the community governance structures examined here had a clear systemic, or cross-system, focus. They were not established simply to develop a new set of programs and services in their communities, but to better coordinate and integrate existing programs. They were also provided access to new or additional funding to fill gaps in service, which also provided a specific task that energized their work. Systems ultimately are made up of programs, and the more effective and fully

resourced that individual programs are, the more effective the overall system is. The role of communities may be as much in building effective programs as it is in designing overall systems.

How can the needed infrastructure to support quality be developed? Strong, well-functioning systems have a variety of infrastructural elements that help maintain and ensure quality – including monitoring and evaluation, training and professional development, research and development and adoption and adaptation of “best practices.” These involve trainers, evaluators, researchers, monitors, and compliance officers. The existing array of state and community programs that serve young children and families and constitute a part of the early learning system that needs to be built do not have a strong infrastructure to support quality. Without such an infrastructure, communities are more likely to flounder in their work and fail to take advantage of the existing and growing knowledge base on effective practice. Without such an infrastructure, states will have difficulty identifying and adapting best community practices for statewide application or providing additional support and technical assistance to struggling communities. These infrastructural funds frequently are the most difficult to secure through state appropriation, yet are a foundation for making program or service funds effective. One possible means to secure such funding that deserves exploration is through public and private partnerships.

In what ways can states and communities most effectively support and resource voluntary support networks? Most public funding designed to strengthen and support

young children and their families involves services administered through professionals to instruct or counsel children or their parents. While these services are important, they do not substitute for voluntary support networks that offer a 24-7 safe and developmental environment for young children, taking advantage of the “teachable moments” that exist throughout the day. Unfortunately, too many parents and their young children do not have the type of voluntary support network that will equip them for success. A service delivery model cannot produce or substitute for these networks. Promising approaches to supporting and sustaining such networks exist, but they are not in the mainstream of work to develop early learning systems. Highly voluntary, their development more often involves creating space, time, and opportunity for interactions than providing specific services to specific families. Identifying the role that states and communities can play in establishing and nurturing such networks is both a challenge and opportunity for early learning system development, but it is ultimately work that must be carried out at the community level.¹²

How can we best provide voice and power to poor, immigrant, and minority families and their communities? Clearly, there are profound historical differences in the opportunities and results for poor, immigrant, and minority young children in terms of health, development, safety, and school readiness. Moving to the community level does not necessarily address these issues of race, class, and culture nor the power relationships in society that block opportunity and development. In fact, it took national actions to desegregate schools and secure voting rights for people of color.

Further, it is not solely within the early learning years that these differences need to be addressed. Early learning (or childhood) system building, however, creates a real opportunity for addressing them, particularly because a young child’s world is so embedded in a neighborhood and community. This requires recognizing the gaps that poor, immigrant, and minority children face and seeking to better address them. Cultural differences and strengths within communities must also be recognized: white, Anglo-European expectations should not be imposed as if they were the only standard for proper child development. Finally, it requires helping to construct a workforce within early (and later) learning that better reflects the race, language, and culture of the diverse community of children in society, with new career ladders and opportunities available within communities that also create the chance for economic and social advances. “Color-blind” approaches at the community or state levels fail to address these issues. How these issues can be placed on the table in ways that spur positive action represents a critical question that community planning and governance structures will need to answer to achieve success.

Notes

- ¹ For a description of the array of state planning and governance structures, see: Bruner, C. (2004). *Building an early learning system: The ABCs of planning and governance structures*. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network Resource Brief and the Build Initiative. Des Moines, IA.
- ² The diagram above was created by the Early Childhood Systems Working Group: Alliance for Early Childhood, The Build Initiative, The Children’s Project, Center for Law and Social Policy, National Center for Children in Poverty,

Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center, State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network, and Zero to Three.

- ³ In fact, it could be argued that there is an evolutionary path implicit in the six states, moving from a demonstration to a statewide approach and successively broadening state investment in local administration over time. While there is some evidence for posing this as a “theory of change” for developing such state-community governance structures, testing it would require continued examination of the development of the three more recent initiatives over subsequent years as well as exploring other models that might emerge.
- ⁴ Much less often cited were issues of race, culture, and power. The geo-political units used to define community generally were at the county or city level, which did not guarantee representation across race, class, and cultural lines.
- ⁵ While a few leaders had their personal vision of what a fully realized system should be and how it should be managed, these leaders also acknowledged that their view was not broadly held and that they currently were not in the position to be given the resources or authority to implement that vision. They saw local actions as a way to build their case.
- ⁶ Goal free evaluation is an evaluation designed for this purpose and has been applied to some comprehensive community change initiatives. Rather than evaluating such efforts in terms of some pre-set objectives and set of hypotheses (which may have been artificially constructed), goal free evaluation starts with the question, “What do you think happened as a result of your work?” Leaders were asked this question and prompted across different areas of possible impact. The gains made then need to be assessed in terms of the actual investments made in them.
- ⁷ This is why there is much more discussion of “blending and braiding” funding than actual consolidation and integration. See: Johnson, K. (2005) *Spending smarter: A funding guide for policymakers and advocates to promote social and emotional health and school readiness*. New York, New York. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University.
- ⁸ For more information about early childhood investments see: *Voices for America’s Children and the Child and Family Policy Center*. (2004)

Early learning left out: An examination of public investment in education and development by child age. Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center and Bruner, C. (2005) *The Build Initiative: Building early learning systems in the states: A report on the year: Build at 2 ½*. Des Moines, IA: Child and Family Policy Center.

⁹ Rogers, E. (1995) *Diffusion of Innovations*. Fourth Ed., New York, New York: The Free Press.

¹⁰ While some community governance structures do focus upon birth to eight, these structures generally do not get into issues of school reform and instruction during the K-3 years. They often have fourth grade reading as a “lagging indicator” or end measure of success. Generally, both structures focusing upon 0-5 and on 0-8 do place an emphasis upon school involvement that covers the transition from pre-school years into kindergarten. The 0-8 emphasis also may involve continuing community partnerships that include after-school activities and programs for children, which is usually the major addition of service focus related to a 0-8 versus a 0-5 focus.

¹¹ Greenberg, M. (2001). *Research-Based Programs and Issues of Implementation*. In *Funding What Works*. National Center for Service Integration Resource Brief 10. Des Moines, IA.

¹² From a systemic perspective, the challenge has been characterized as “professionalizing the voluntary,” “replicating the unique,” or “mass producing warm, caring relationships.”

Chapter Two

Building Connections: Six State Case Studies of Early Childhood System Building at the State and Local Levels

by Julia Coffman and Michelle Stover Wright

Colorado

The Colorado Community Consolidated Child Care Pilots were legislatively established in 1997 in response to an increased awareness and research base pointing to the importance of early childhood for school readiness and success, as well as an increased number of women in the workforce due to welfare reform. The Pilots were created as community-based initiatives to build an early learning system through the collaboration of local partners and to provide a way to include local voices in the planning process for state early childhood work.

Background. The Pilots:

- Ensure collaboration among public and private stakeholders
- Respond to the needs of working parents
- Enhance child care quality
- Consolidate funding sources to create an early childhood system.

Initially, 12 Pilots were chosen and given the charge of identifying barriers to early learning education. Currently, as a result of legislative action in 2000, there are 17 Pilots serving 30 of Colorado's 64 counties. The Pilots include many heavily-populated areas, and 72% of the state's population lives in Pilot areas. Geographically, the Pilots were self-determined through an application process based primarily on county lines or on past partnerships among counties.

All 17 Pilots are working to build an early childhood system by focusing on early care and education, health, mental health, and

family support. Eight comprehensive goals guide their efforts:

- 1) Program quality and standards
- 2) Program availability
- 3) Parent and family engagement
- 4) Professional and workforce development
- 5) Public engagement
- 6) Systems oversight
- 7) Accountability
- 8) Funding and financing

State Structure and Role. The newly-formed Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission is the state-level early childhood structure working on early childhood policy. Created by 2004 legislation, the Commission has been charged with creating a system of care, education, and readiness for young children in Colorado. According to the Commission's mission statement, "...The Commission will identify critical issues, evaluate policies, make recommendations, and propose legislation to continue to improve school readiness in Colorado." Pilots have representation on the Commission and their role is continually evolving as the Commission's work moves ahead.

In partnership with the Commission is the Early Childhood State Systems Team (ECSST), made up of state agencies and organizations working across early childhood education, health, mental health, and family support. The ECSST meets monthly and is the developing system's planning arm. Their focus is also the eight comprehensive goals. Each goal has a task

force made up of diverse stakeholders. In collaboration with the Pilots, the ECSST named and branded the systems-building work as “Smart Start Colorado”.

Through an annual application process to the Colorado Department of Human Services and Department of Education, the Pilots receive federal funding from the Child Care Development Block Grant. The almost \$975,000 of funding currently available to the Pilots is a change from the beginning when the Pilots received no funding.

Pilots apply annually for funding based on local-level strategic planning and community needs as they relate to the eight comprehensive goals. Funding ranges from \$30,000 to \$100,000 (\$974,000 statewide) and funds are generally used to build local infrastructure, such as staffing the local Pilot coordinator position and funding systems-building work in areas such as improving child care quality and accessibility, developing public engagement tools, and providing parents with leadership opportunities.

While the funding provided through this annual process is not enough to fully address all community needs, additional money is raised locally through state or local grants, foundations, or other leveraging of resources. State-level staff, including a Program Director through the Colorado Department of Education and a State Program Manager who works directly with the Pilot coordinators statewide, work with the Pilot councils to identify other funding sources so that all areas of need can be addressed.

The Colorado Department of Education and Department of Human Services Division of

Child Care, as the funding institutions, have final authority over how funds are spent, and the Pilots are accountable to the state. The state also requires local needs assessments, an annual formal proposal process, and specific outcome and other feedback data. In addition, the state identifies the ability of Pilots to request waivers and the ability to leverage resources at the local level (more on this later).

To date, Pilots have been selected on the basis of their collaborative council’s interest and commitment. Selection has not been based on the development of an encompassing statewide structure for the purpose of early learning system building throughout Colorado.

Whether expanding statewide or even including other sites in the Pilots program is feasible rests on the availability of funding. Assuring sufficient funding to support a statewide effort hit a roadblock in June 2006 with the Governor’s veto of legislation that would support this move.

Some at the local level do not support taking existing funding, whether all or in part, from established Pilot sites and using it to start a collaboration elsewhere. This would result in lost trust at the local level and would affect progress and momentum in existing sites. In addition, there is concern that funding must be sufficient to ensure new Pilots can gain roots and succeed. Finally, if Pilots move to cover all areas of the state, they will go into communities that are developmentally in early stages of collaboration and system building. This could change the overall complexion of Pilot efforts, although the current broad reach of the Pilots makes statewide expansion less daunting.

Local Structure and Role. In 1997, the Pilots began with the mandate to create a seamless system for early learning and education (by which the legislature meant child care and preschool). As the Pilots proceeded, it became apparent that to impact children during their pre-k years, the approach had to be much more comprehensive and include areas such as family support and education, mental health, and health care that not only impact the child but also the family. Other changes have occurred as the Pilots have evolved, including a change from volunteer to paid Pilot coordinators and the inclusion of a state-level Pilot manager.

Pilots are each locally-led by early childhood councils consisting of community leaders from early care and education, health, mental health, and family support. The councils develop, coordinate, and implement services for those involved with the early childhood system in their area including professionals, children, and families. The councils assess community needs, plan activities and programming to address those needs, and build local early childhood systems.

Pilot councils make decisions about how to use their state-provided funding. They can identify their needs, choose ways to address those needs, and identify the resources required to address them. Again, while they do not get all the funding necessary to fully address their requests, they prioritize areas of focus and identify where their funding will be allocated.

The consolidation of funding occurs at the local level through the blending and braiding of multiple federal, local, and private dollars. Additional federal and state dollars

like the Colorado Preschool Program and the Colorado Child Care Assistance subsidy funds are positively impacted by the Pilots' collaborative work and bringing together of representatives using those funds. Local Pilot partners work together to identify ways to use and leverage funding more collaboratively to make sure it is used in a way that reflects community needs and builds on their systemic early childhood goals. For instance, many Pilot communities braid Pilot funds, Resource and Referral dollars, and foundation grants to provide ratings and professional development to child care centers and home providers in their communities.

Local sites are gaining more authority and flexibility over time, and local representatives and early childhood advocates view this as a positive move. Increased interest and support at the county level (due to interest and planning through the County Commissioners) as well as increased expertise, support and funding available locally are examples of this move. Successes reported locally include, but are not limited to, increased public support and knowledge regarding early childhood importance and issues, and increased business community involvement. These successes are further evidence that sites are ready to shoulder more authority and decision making at the county or community level.

Communication. Information is shared and communicated in a variety of ways both among the Pilot sites and from the Pilots to the state level. Pilot coordinators meet monthly to discuss issues, successes, networking opportunities, and other local experiences with each other and state-level staff. This has given sites the opportunity to

learn from each other and share their expertise and insights.

Two-day quarterly meetings of Pilot coordinators and state-level leaders also are held. Technical assistance is provided at these meetings and other issues are addressed in more detail. This information sharing and networking has led to a more unified local voice and in turn has given local suggestions and ideas more weight at the state level. Advocates specifically identify this as a huge asset for early childhood system building in Colorado.

The focus of the Pilots is dynamic. As the funding and needs change, so does the focus in some Pilots. The state-level Program Director and Manager work to stay current with these local developments and to assess how their experiences can inform actions and funding at the state level. State-level staff see a major part of their role as gathering information from the Pilots and making sure that their successes, ideas, insights and needs are available when state-level systems decisions are made. Integrating the lessons-learned locally into a state system and vision has been essential to Colorado's work, and is reflected in the comprehensive goals that all Pilots and state agencies work together on.

A waiver system also has provided for a flow of information to the state on needed changes to regulation and policy. Pilots can petition the state for waivers to existing state rules and regulations that Pilots identify as barriers to achieving local results. Examples of waivers requested at the local level that have had an impact on state policy include the expansion of the Colorado State preschool program from 4- and 5-year-olds to 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds; raising the

Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) eligibility from 185 to 220% of poverty; and streamlining the application and other involved processes for securing CCAP dollars. These also are examples of the positives that come from having funding flow through the Pilot sites and making sure that they have a way to report issues back to the state.

Legislators have shown a strong interest in listening to the lessons learned from the Pilots and taking their recommendations and ideas into account. During the 2006 legislative session, the legislature showed their support by passing a bill (HB06-1397) that would have invested \$2 million in state funds to expand the Pilots and create early childhood councils across the state. However, Governor Bill Owens (R) vetoed the bill in June 2006.

Technical Assistance. Initially, the state provided substantial technical assistance as the Pilots were set up. Since then, Pilots have received less technical assistance, although initiatives such as Smart Start North Carolina have been able to provide some additional support.

Recently, technical assistance requests have increased in areas such as financing early childhood systems, professional development, public engagement, and data collection and evaluation. Pilot councils are asking for the same types of systems development assistance that states are requesting around the country.

At the same time, there are limited resources available—at the state or local level—to provide technical assistance. Those at the state have provided technical assistance in bits and pieces as issues have come up and

resources have become available, but there is concern that when the state cannot respond to requests for assistance, Pilots feel abandoned in their work. The County Commissioners are focusing on technical assistance in these and other areas as they proceed in their planning processes. Stakeholders and coordinators from the Pilot communities also provide advice and guidance to other Pilot communities in areas in which they have experience or expertise, although that still takes resources and time. Ultimately, the Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission may have to tackle this issue and develop an infrastructure to support the Pilots, as local planning and decision making requires increasingly technical and individualized assistance and support.

Advocacy. The Colorado Children’s Campaign is a strong state child advocacy organization that develops policy positions on early childhood, lobbies at the state capital, and supports a network of grassroots and grassroots advocates on children’s issues. The “It’s About Kids” Project provides advocacy training for local early childhood stakeholders, which includes enlisting Pilot site representatives and drawing on their experiences in formulating policy.

Advocacy is an area of role ambiguity for Pilots (many of whom are funded by blended funding streams that include federal dollars). They must determine when it is acceptable to advocate or lobby for additional resources, funding, or specific legislation or policy. Currently, this issue is being addressed by making a distinction between educating local legislative representatives about local activities and the need for a focus on early childhood, and actual lobbying for legislation. The Pilots

are becoming skillful at educating their local state legislators. Even when money has been tight or there was a previously narrow focus on K-12, participants in the Pilots have had some successes in obtaining funding due to their advocacy education at the local and state levels.

Successes. The importance and impact of the Community Consolidated Child Care Pilots cannot be overstated. The Pilots have started and added to an ongoing conversation around the importance and needed comprehensiveness of early childhood work. They have provided a place for programming innovation and new strategies to be tried before being expanded on a larger scale. They have provided state policymakers with strong evidence about the importance of early childhood programming and support. They have encouraged collaboration with other system building efforts, including the state’s Maternal and Child Health Early Childhood Comprehensive Service planning grant. The current statewide system-building efforts, including the new Commission, likely would not be in place without Pilot successes and the attention to early learning they have created, both locally and statewide.

Examples of specific Pilot activities and successes include:

- Three local early childhood councils have set up their own 501c3 structures to allow them to serve as their own fiscal agent.
- Some Pilots have collaborated and applied for funding together in order to strengthen their funding base, and then worked together to better utilize the funding between their sites.

- Councils have formed relationships with foundations and other funders. The Boulder Pilot and the Knight Foundation worked together on a socioeconomic study about the early care and education needs of Latino children in the community.
- Pilots have formed ways to bring in volunteers and local champions specifically from the business sector and have kept them invested by carefully planning where they could best utilize them.
- Local councils have run successful ballot initiatives to increase funding and support.
- Pilots have worked on ways to educate and engage parents and families. For example, the San Luis Valley site sponsors an annual Month of the Young Child Celebration every April, and the Prowers County site holds Parents Academies to discuss areas such as literacy development and Kindergarten readiness.
- Pilot councils have increased early childhood public awareness through specific campaigns and efforts. For example, the Mesa County Pilot has aired eight public service announcements on local television addressing early childhood topics, and the Fremont County site hosted a candidate forum to address the candidates' positions on early childhood issues.
- Pilots have done extensive work in the area of program quality and standards. For example, the Denver and Triad sites came together to revise and simplify rules and regulations. They also created Licensing Development Specialist positions with lower case loads than the

State Licensing Specialists as a way to increase technical assistance to child care providers in their area.

Lessons. Lessons also have emerged from Colorado's experience:

A "cookie cutter approach" is not effective for individual communities. This notion is central to the Pilots' work. Respecting communities' diverse needs and approaches to early childhood systems building has been a recurring theme in decision making and planning at the local level. Without success and ownership in early learning systems development locally, this focus would not exist at the state level.

At the same time, it is an important balancing act to maintain accountability at the state level for funding while affording flexibility to the local Pilots and encouraging experimentation (and some failures).

Straightforward state-local communication is essential. Colorado has worked to address the issue of getting straightforward communication from Pilot sites. Because the state funds the Pilots, there is concern that Pilots provide only their "best face." The state has attempted to address this through relationship and trust building, as well as increased and reasonable reporting mechanisms. Monthly and annual reports, which highlight accomplishments and barriers, are required to get the full spectrum of local experiences. These reports are provided across Pilot sites to share experiences and to address barriers that are present at multiple sites. State staff have worked to

define the local and state relationship as collegial instead of funder-fundee. They have worked to make sure that reporting

requirements are reasonable and their purpose clear and well-communicated.

Iowa

Enacted by the Iowa legislature in 1998, the Iowa Community Empowerment Initiative was created to provide local control for systems building in early childhood-focused programming and work. It has the goal of improving the well being of children ages birth to 5 and their families through locally-focused collaboration and programming.

The initiative establishes local Community Empowerment Areas where local citizens lead collaborative efforts to achieve results in these focus areas:

- Healthy children
- Children ready to succeed in school
- Safe and supportive communities
- Secure and nurturing families and
- Secure and nurturing child care environments

Background. Community Empowerment Areas were locally-determined through an application process. They formed primarily along county lines, although some are multi-county. Multi-county areas are based primarily on past partnerships and collaborations among counties, as well as population size (rural counties have smaller populations, so multi-county partnerships allow more people to be served). Each Community Empowerment Area identifies a fiscal agent to provide support and the capacity to receive and disburse funding. During the first year, 11 Empowerment sites were selected through a competitive process. Within three years, Iowa Empowerment

expanded to 58 Empowerment Areas covering all 99 Iowa counties.

The Iowa Empowerment Initiative receives funding through legislative appropriations, with monies coming from 1) the State School Ready Fund which supports comprehensive services for young children 0-5, and 2) the Early Childhood Fund which supports enhancements for child care quality and capacity. The Early Childhood Fund comes from federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars as designated through the state.

Funding for the Community Empowerment Initiative has increased over time. Initially, funding was disbursed to local sites through a competitive process, and the first appropriation for Community Empowerment Areas was \$9 million in 1998. Once the Initiative was statewide, a formula determined the funding for each local site. The formula for state funding consists of three prongs—1) a base amount, 2) number of children 0-5, and 3) families with young children living at or below the poverty level. The formula for federal funds is based on the Family Investment (FIP) participation in the previous year. Funding in 2005-6 was \$32.8 million, and legislative action in 2006-7 increased that amount to \$49 million.

State Structure and Role. At the state level, the Iowa Empowerment Board facilitates state and community Empowerment Initiative efforts.

The Empowerment Board oversees local Community Empowerment plans and provides technical assistance to Community Empowerment Boards in areas such as strategic planning; identifying funding; and promoting collaboration among state and local early care, education, health, and human services programs.

As of July 2007, the Iowa Empowerment Board consists of 22 voting members, including the Directors of the Departments of Economic Development, Education, Human Rights, Human Services, Public Health and the Department of Workforce Development, as well as 16 citizen members appointed by the Governor. In addition to voting members, six members from Iowa's General Assembly serve in a non-voting capacity.

Iowa Empowerment provides state-level staffing for coordination, technical assistance, and support to local Empowerment coordinators and boards. A community empowerment facilitator and a community liaison make up the Office of Empowerment, housed in the Iowa Department of Management. Also provided at the state level is a Community Empowerment Assistance Team made up of state agency representatives from the State Departments of Economic Development, Education, Human Rights, Human Services, Management, and Public Health. Each department donates a .5 FTE to the Community Empowerment effort. The team provides oversight, reviews annual reports, leads the re-designation process, and

provides technical assistance to Community Empowerment sites.

While the state legislature has ultimate authority regarding funding levels, guidelines, and accountability, the state-level Empowerment Board and staff provide guidance and oversight to the Empowerment communities.

The state-level Empowerment Board and staff provide guidance and legislative interpretation regarding how funds are allocated locally. Prior to receiving funding, local boards receive approval of their submitted budgets and have a signed agreement. The state team makes every effort to make the process as flexible as possible and lets local sites develop their programs independently. As long as local sites follow guidelines for the two Empowerment funding streams and present annual outcome data, they have authority over their work based on their community priorities.

The Empowerment Board and staff work to make their relationship with local sites extend beyond traditional funder-fundee. While local flexibility and control has been a central theme for Iowa Empowerment, it also has led to challenges. For example, the issue of state-level accountability has been raised. The legislature wants local control, but insists on statewide accountability. This leads to the need for reporting requirements and commonality of results across sites, even if sites have different areas of focus. Recent funding for quality preschool programming has increased accountability requirements and this trend is expected to continue. Sites will have to provide more consistent information to the state.

To this end, a set of consistent performance measures was needed so Empowerment Areas could “speak with one voice”. A data workgroup that included local Empowerment representatives and a state technical assistance team member developed measures by type of program, including:

- An unduplicated count of children participating
- An unduplicated count of families participating
- The number of face-to face visits
- The percent of participants without a confirmed child abuse report while in the program
- The percent of children, 0-3 years, referred to Early ACCESS services.

Iowa Empowerment staff also track state indicators in 11 areas to address the question of state-level impacts.

Local Structure and Role. Each Empowerment Area has a Community Empowerment Board to support activities and collaboration in the development of early care, health, and education systems. Board make-up is determined at the local level, although state law requires 51% of members be citizens (non-providers) and elected officials, and the board must include consumers, as well as business, faith, human services, education, and health representatives.

Community Empowerment Boards receive substantial state funds to build local systems and are responsible for:

- Producing bylaws for their operation and structure

- Developing and implementing a community plan
- Awarding funds for local services
- Educating the public and communicating the importance of services for children 0-5 and their families
- Reaching out to private and public organizations to be included in the collaborative
- Building community commitment to address specific results, as determined by the Iowa Empowerment Board
- Annually reporting local investment outcomes.

In addition to the Community Empowerment Board, many areas have an Empowerment coordinator to oversee meetings and direct local efforts via the local board’s guidance. The coordinator also communicates directly with other sites and state Empowerment staff. Funding received by Community Empowerment Boards has an administrative cap of either 3% or 5% for board support or other administrative functions.

Community Empowerment Areas are funded year to year, but the re-designation process as a Community Empowerment Area occurs every three years.

Guidelines for how the money can be used exist in the areas of preschool tuition support, family support programming, and an administrative limit. Within those categories there is flexibility on how the monies are disbursed. That flexibility allows sites to put together plans and use funding in ways that are most appropriate for their sites within the existing guidelines. For the family support component, areas choose to fund one or more programs serving families,

based on the needs of families. Preschool support funding specifies that boards support tuition and access for families who want their child to have a preschool experience. Discretionary funding has been used in ways such as provider training and professional development, emergency child care, wrap-around child care, health fairs or other health supports, and child care conferences.

Coordination and collaboration provided to and by local Empowerment sites also bring staff resources and expertise to the table in ways that help meet local needs without requiring direct monetary support. This highlights the importance of a funded local coordinator position, so that person can yield additional impact by coordinating or referring programs to meet needs without actually using Empowerment dollars.

Communication. Quarterly Empowerment coordinator technical assistance meetings offer opportunities to share ideas and information. State-level Empowerment staff lead and coordinate these sessions, which are held in a centrally-located site.

Empowerment Area coordinators also network with each other and with state staff to stay abreast of successes or identify ways to address local barriers. Also, there are periodic and less formal regional get-togethers where coordinators meet to discuss issues specific to their areas.

The state-level Empowerment Board hears directly from the local sites through both state Empowerment staff and local coordinators on occasion. Some local coordinators feel listened to, especially about issues such as funding for local planning and collaboration. However, local

sites do not feel they yet have a strong voice in larger statewide system building.

Technical Assistance. The Community Empowerment Assistance Team provides support and technical assistance to Community Empowerment Areas. The Assistance Team meets for three hours every other week to review technical assistance requests, discuss specific issues within local areas, and review annual reports and outcomes. Assistance in areas such as community planning, board development, and accountability are usually the focus, and individual technical assistance requests are provided via email, phone calls or in person outside of quarterly meetings.

Regional trainings for coordinators and local board members are also available on topics such as board development training. Iowa Empowerment also provides sites with the Iowa Community Empowerment Toolkit, a detailed publication that includes guidance in areas that include developing an early childhood agenda, developing community commitment, setting up an effective board, achieving results, and specific tools such as a collaborative functioning scale survey or information on the impact of open meeting laws at the local level.

State-Level Systems Building. In 2002, Early Childhood Iowa—a state-level alliance of stakeholders in early care, health, and education systems that impact children—was established as an outgrowth of planning and recommendations from a North Carolina Smart Start Technical Assistance grant. Among the alliance’s stated purposes are serving in an advisory capacity for the Iowa Empowerment Board and being a “catalyst in the development of Iowa’s comprehensive, integrated early care,

health, and education systems.” Early Childhood Iowa strives for results that align with the Iowa Empowerment process at both the local and state levels.

Early Childhood Iowa meets bimonthly and focuses more comprehensively on early learning systems development at the state level. The formal system for moving information from the local sites to this state-level governance body is still being addressed. The alliance’s formation has moved the idea of state-level system building forward while attempting to integrate the lessons learned from the local and state Iowa Empowerment work. Community Empowerment at a state and local level and the Early Childhood Iowa group are moving toward common goals, are using a similar language, and are developing a more unified voice for early learning systems policy and development.

Locally, Iowa is beginning to expand to include a more state-level system building focus as well. Public engagement and education efforts that bring in “unusual suspects” such as law enforcement and the business community began locally and are expanding to the state level.

Advocacy. Local stakeholders and Empowerment coordinators are commonly in touch with their local legislators, advocating for early childhood-friendly policies and funding at the state level. They also work through the newly formed Association for Iowa’s Children, made up of Empowerment coordinators who attempt to provide a unified local voice to guide state-level policy making directly without having to go through the state-level staff and Board. About half of local coordinators have joined. The Association meets quarterly in

conjunction with Community Empowerment coordinator meetings. What the unified voice for early childhood should look like in the state has been an ongoing discussion.

Successes. Community Empowerment Areas have achieved many local successes, including:

- Linn County Empowerment has worked to increase public awareness about early childhood through a grassroots campaign using flyers, focus groups, and individual meetings with business leaders about the impacts of low and high quality child care. As a result, quality child care has recently been included in the list of top priorities for Linn County planning.
- The Black Hawk County Area has entrenched its Empowerment work with the Cedar Valley’s Promise Initiative, a federal initiative to pull together communities around youth ages 0-18 years. The Empowerment work is done as the 0-5 focus of this larger approach, and utilizes resources that are available to them as a Promise Community (e.g., a grant writer).
- In 2004, Benton County Empowerment worked with local businesses, schools, and other local partners to provide a free workshop by a national expert on parenting, teaching, school discipline, and non-violent conflict resolution.
- The Jones County Empowerment Area has collaborated with their local Community Action Program and Head Start to provide support for transportation costs to and from Head Start classrooms.
- The Polk County Empowerment area is involved with a preschool collaborative among the county’s 8 school districts to

address the school readiness gap by administering an assessment (IGDIS) at the Empowerment-funded preschool sites.

- The Pottawattamie Community Empowerment group has co-sponsored with the area Chamber of Commerce a task force to engage business, community and political leaders in a dialogue regarding high-quality early childhood development and economic development.

Lessons. The Iowa Community Empowerment Initiative has come far since its inception, including a substantial funding increase and with it the capacity to address the needs of children ages 0-5 statewide. Increased activity in the area of statewide early childhood system building is a reflection of the successes achieved locally. Creating statewide impact measures and a unified voice across the state are current focus areas as the Initiative works to maintain essential local control and flexibility and as system building efforts move ahead. Lessons learned from Iowa's Community Empowerment Initiative include:

The local coordinator should be a paid position. It should not rely solely on volunteer staff who often have other responsibilities or priorities. Perhaps not surprisingly, sites with paid coordinators have the resources, capacity, and time to collaborate and build local systems, and

consequently make more consistent steps forward. There is also more time to communicate at the state level and add local experiences to the formation of a unified early childhood voice. It is also important to provide training for new coordinators to ensure a smooth transition both at the state and local levels.

Focus on systems; do not try to manage programs at the local level. Coordinating programming and collaborating should be the local focus. In addition, the focus should be on identifying and filling in gaps through small investments and collaboration. Managing programs takes the focus away from community outreach and system building.

The focus on system building both locally and statewide has been growing since the inception of Iowa Community Empowerment. Local sites have been putting more resources into system building and collaboration, which has allowed them to expand and address areas of duplication and collaboration with less funding than setting up new programming would require. This focus on local collaboration and coordination is relatively new, as local coordinators have increased their understanding and capacity to provide guidance and leadership in this area

Minnesota

The Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative (MECI) was launched in 2003 to ensure that all of Minnesota's young children can thrive and are able to learn, achieve, and succeed.

MECI works toward this goal by developing early childhood coalitions in communities throughout the state that plan and govern their own system-building efforts. Local

coalitions also advocate for state-level system building to ensure that essential early childhood programs, services, and infrastructure are coordinated and supported statewide.

In Minnesota, foundations have pioneered efforts to establish a meaningful role for communities in early childhood system building. The MECI began as a collaborative venture of The McKnight Foundation, Minnesota's largest private foundation; the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs), six independent nonprofit foundations providing grantmaking and services to six geographic regions outside of the Twin Cities;^{1 2} and Ready 4 K, an advocacy organization working to build broad public and private support for school readiness policies and programs.³

Background. MECI represents the first closely coordinated effort across the six regional MIFs. In 2001, while searching for a common issue on which they could collaborate and use to inform state-level policy, the MIFs chose early childhood. MECI was born from this shared focus.

The MIFs secured funding from the McKnight Foundation to launch MECI with a three-year \$3.2 million grant. The McKnight Foundation continued MECI funding this year, and the Initiative is beginning its second three-year grant. Since its inception, MIFs and local coalitions have leveraged their McKnight funding to generate several million dollars in additional support from corporations, other foundations, and local funding sources.

Regional Structure and Role. The six MIFs provide oversight and overall direction

for the Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative. They select communities for MECI involvement and then work closely with them to build coalitions, and guide them through a multi-step community organizing process themselves.

MIFs have used a phased approach to MECI start-up and expansion. The first phase began with the launch of 12 coalitions (two per MIF) in September 2003. The second phase added 12 more in January 2004, and the third added another 12 in September 2004. The Initiative's fourth phase added 15 coalitions in January 2006, bringing the total to 51 coalitions.

When new phases begin, MIFs conduct research to select prospective communities in their regions—defined loosely as a geographic area that might be a county, city, or logical grouping of towns or cities—for MECI involvement. Each MIF currently has either 8 or 9 coalitions, with a plan to expand that number to 10 to 12 by September 2006.

Communities are selected based on their readiness to move an early childhood system building agenda. They must have existing early care and education partnerships and a clear commitment to achieving a shared community vision and action plan that supports young children and families.

Once communities are selected, MIFs work with them to gather partners and community input, establish a vision, and develop an action plan (described more below). MIFs then help fund, monitor, and provide ongoing technical assistance to coalitions once they begin implementing their action plans.

Local Structure and Role. While MIFs provide oversight and direction, at its core, MECI is community-driven. MIFs do not dictate what communities should do. Rather, they believe that communities are best equipped to consider and respond to their youngest children’s needs, and therefore encourage communities to build approaches based on their unique strengths. Early childhood coalitions follow a common coalition-building process, but make their own decisions about where to focus.

Communities engage in an intensive coalition building process that is grounded in community organizing principles. The process builds relationships, often across individuals and organizations that do not regularly interact. It also increases community awareness about the importance of early childhood and the availability, or lack thereof, of services and coordination across those services.

Coalition building begins with the hiring of a part-time local community coordinator to lead the effort. Coordinators receive a small yearly stipend.⁴

Coalition members are then recruited from diverse sectors. They include parents and elected officials, and represent early childhood education, child care, K-12, postsecondary education, community and economic development, business, faith, media, law enforcement, health, and human services.

Coalitions then gather broad community input to establish the groundwork for developing a shared vision and action plan. First, community interviews averaging 50-60 per community are conducted to scan existing resources and identify system gaps.

Results are shared at a local coalition meeting. The coalition then holds a broader community “speak out” forum to both raise awareness about existing early childhood issues and gather additional input on the challenges and opportunities identified during the interview process.

Common system themes have emerged across communities. They include the need for more attention on 1) infant/toddler, extended care, and respite child care, 2) infant/toddler mental health services, 3) sustainable and adequate funding for early care and education programs, 4) outreach to underserved populations, 5) program waiting lists and access, and 6) social, cultural, and economic service disparities.

Once community input is gathered, the coalition goes through a visioning process to imagine how the community can best foster young children’s growth and development. Vision statements help focus the coalition moving forward.

Finally, the coalition develops an action plan that prioritizes activities, projects, programs, partnerships, and policy changes. Plans typically emphasize projects that fill in service gaps, support or bolster existing services, or build relationships between system components. After the plan is developed, implementation begins under the coordinator’s leadership.

Action plans have resulted in a range of innovative system building projects. For example, they support new or existing services, such as literacy programs, home visits for new parents, or health screenings. They also promote better connections between existing programs and services, such as meetings between early childhood

and Kindergarten teachers to help with Kindergarten transition. And they bolster local infrastructure through enhancements in professional development, resource sharing, and public awareness building about the importance of quality early care and education.

MIFs provide funding to help implement coalition projects, although they fund coalitions in different ways. For example, some provide a fixed amount per coalition (e.g., \$15,000-\$20,000 a year). Others stage their giving and base it on coalition grant requests. For example, after action plans are developed, the Northland Foundation immediately provides coalitions with \$4,000 for a project that can be done quickly and that will get a fast result. This practice is based on the premise that a quick success will increase coalition member commitment to the effort. After that, coalitions can apply for project-specific funding. The Northland Foundation finds, however, that limited proposals come in. Coalitions end up being more resourceful in getting volunteer or in-kind commitments to implement plans, and are mindful of sustainability threats with new funding.

Some coalitions have become 501c3 organizations. MECI's sustainability strategy at the local level involves helping participating sites integrate the coalition into their early childhood infrastructure. The coalition building process helps to develop that capacity through the organizing process, and through ongoing technical assistance, training, and financial support. In addition, each MIF has a strong commitment to children and families and plans to continue to be an ongoing resource in communities for years to come.

Communication. MECI partners—MIFs, early childhood coalitions, and Ready 4K—have a variety of mechanisms that enable them to communicate and collaborate within and across regions. Mechanisms include:

Regional MIF Meetings—Each MIF holds meetings for the 8 or 9 coalitions within their region. These meetings provide opportunities for diffusion of innovation through information sharing, education, and training. They also offer opportunities for developing coordinated regional projects. For example, the coalitions in one MIF did a joint project on educating parents to screen their three-year-olds for school readiness. They developed a checklist for parents and created backpacks for kids that contained information about the screening. These education materials were available to coalitions to use in school districts throughout the region and were shared with other MIFs.

Statewide Coordinator Meetings—The Statewide Early Childhood Coordinators' Network connects coalition coordinators statewide for purposes of sharing ideas and advancing public policy. They meet quarterly along with the MIFs and Ready 4 K to exchange information and successful strategies, and to problem solve on individual challenges. Network meetings also offer opportunities for training, technical assistance, and relationship building with new partners such as potential funders. After meetings, coordinators take new knowledge back to their coalitions.

Promising Strategies Resource Directory for Early Childhood Initiative Projects—The MIFs developed this directory, which currently features over 235 projects and programs

implemented by coalition communities across the state. These projects include home visiting programs, resource coordination efforts, public awareness and advocacy campaigns, kindergarten transition programs, child care provider training/networking opportunities, early literacy programs, and family events. The resource guide provides replicable project ideas for local coalitions so they do not have to “recreate the wheel”.

Leadership from the Minnesota Initiative Foundations also participates in other groups and opportunities that help to further Minnesota’s early care and education movement and policy agenda.

Early Childhood Partners Group—Organized by MIFs and Ready 4 K, the 14 organizations in this group are all focused on early care and education. The group meets quarterly to share information across organizations and generate ideas to move early learning issues throughout the state. Partners work on joint projects, such as message framing workshops and leadership summits.

Early Childhood Funders Network—MIFs participate in this group of Minnesota foundations that fund in the area of early childhood and meet every other month.

State and regional conferences—MIFs and Ready 4 K, in partnership with other early childhood stakeholders, organize statewide and regional conferences to advance early care and education. For example, one conference last year, titled “Seize the Opportunity: Invest in young Children,” exceeded expectations in terms of statewide participation,

attracting 700 participants from all over the state. Individual MIFs also hold conferences on topics such as early childhood leadership.

Technical Assistance. MIFs work with coalitions to gather partners and community input, establish a vision, and develop an action plan for system building. MIFs provide ongoing technical assistance to coalitions once they begin implementing their action plans.

Advocacy. Ready 4 K works with the MIFs and early childhood coalitions to build public awareness and a groundswell of support and participation in state-level early childhood advocacy.

Several years ago, with support from the Build Initiative, Ready 4 K developed a five-year “Road Map to School Readiness.” The Road Map establishes a vision for ensuring all young children in Minnesota enter Kindergarten ready to learn. That vision includes a need for essential services and programs (e.g., preschool, health, etc.) and infrastructure (e.g., quality, professional development, standards, etc.) at the state level. It also includes a role for communities as critical voices in encouraging policymakers to fulfill the Road Map’s vision.

MECI has greatly enhanced Ready 4 K’s capacity to engage community members in advocacy around the Road Map, and Ready 4 K’s yearly policy agendas linked to it. Because early childhood coalitions are founded with a community organizing process, Ready 4 K has access to an already informed and engaged local-level constituency. MECI coalitions and meetings

also provide a mechanism and forum for coordinating advocacy efforts statewide.

Ready 4 K engages in two-way communication with MIFs and coalitions around its policy advocacy agenda. Ready 4 K solicits their input on the agenda and then provides regular policy updates and calls to action. Ready 4 K also educates MIFs and coalition members on core policy issues and provides advocacy training and tips for communicating with state legislators.

Typically, when policy-informing opportunities arise on issues like the state's quality rating system or child care subsidies, Ready 4 K issues calls to action across all the coalitions. MIFs and coalition members are encouraged to contact policymakers to voice their support or opposition on specific issues. If more strategic advocacy is needed, Ready 4 K mobilizes specific coalitions to target their elected officials if those officials hold important decision making positions.

Successes. In the three years since it began, MECI has made much progress.

51 early childhood coalitions are in place. The 51 coalitions together encompass 135 communities in 42 of 80 MIF-served counties. As of September 2006, there will be 65 coalitions across the state.

All coalitions solicited extensive community input. Across the coalitions, more than 2,000 community members have participated in face-to-face interviews to provide input on existing resource availability and access. All 51 coalitions have held community forums with a collective 4,000 participants.

Coalition members represent diverse system interests. Coalition members deliberately come from diverse backgrounds. Across the 51 coalitions, parents are the largest member constituency at 22%. Another one-fifth of members (20%) represent the early care and education community. Fourteen percent come from K-12 education, and 13% from community and economic development. Other sectors with notable representation include business, the faith community, elected officials, and health representatives.

All 51 coalitions are implementing their action plans. After developing vision statements and strategic action plans, the coalitions established since 2003 are now carrying them out.

All coalitions have been involved in state-level advocacy. While policy successes recently have been elusive given the state's current political and economic climate, Ready 4 K has seen community members in coalitions across all six regions involved in state-level advocacy. Some coalitions have participated more than others, depending on the local legislators commitment, or lack there of, to early care and education.

Lessons. Although MECI is still a relatively young initiative, lessons already have emerged about practices that work well in developing meaningful roles for communities in early childhood system building at both the local and state levels.

Emphasize community organizing principles. While MECI coalition development is a lengthy and intensive

process, because it is built on community organizing principles, the process is inclusive and participatory. These aspects, in turn, get members to buy in and stay committed.

Staff local efforts. Early childhood coalitions have a coordinator who is financially compensated for leading this work. Coordinators help keep early childhood issues on the public agenda and sustain local energy.

Focus on quick successes. While not a funding approach shared across MIFs, the practice of first funding small projects that can be immediately successful can be productive. As communities move from their vision to action, they often focus on doing small, short-term projects to benefit children and families, such as family fun days, story times, parent education sessions, and children's fairs. These initial projects serve as building blocks in a community's development to focus on bigger systemic change issues. They build momentum, garner additional support, and rally the community around young children.

Often, system-building efforts fail to see success in the short-term because they tackle the biggest and hardest challenges first. In addition, action plans fail to set achievable and incremental targets. As a result, participants grow discouraged and lose interest when success is elusive and long-term.

Use voluntary support networks. MIFs and coalitions have been particularly successful in mobilizing voluntary support networks. This success comes in part from involving partners from

different sectors. Coalition members do not share the same resources or limitations. As a result, they can offer different supports and commitments. In addition, broad community involvement typically ends with the action planning process. With MECI, coalition member involvement is expected beyond planning, into implementation. Broad community involvement continues through local task force participation.

Offer long-term time and commitment. Building grassroots early-childhood coalitions is a time intensive process. Time and long-term commitment are essential to making positive change.

Challenges. The MECI model also faces some challenges regarding early childhood system building and local-state connections.

MECI lacks a firm connection to state government. In other states, community-based organizations or structures that focus on early childhood system building typically have a link to a state agency or publicly-funded governing body. MECI's lack of such a connection can be a barrier to diffusing innovation and moving state-level policy and regulations to better support local systems statewide. At the same time, there are advantages in being separate, as MECI is less affected by changing political tides.

Some connections between MECI and the state have developed, however, and are instructive. For example, in 2004 the Department of Education partnered with 17 coalitions to select school districts for a pilot project that trained Kindergarten teachers to assess incoming students for

school readiness. This use of the coalitions and their communities as a laboratory for testing innovations that can be scaled up statewide is a promising approach for strengthening the state-local connection.

Leaders from the MIFs have assumed key roles with Ready 4 K through board and committee membership. They have played an integral part in the development of Minnesota's early care and education policy agenda.

North Carolina

Smart Start is North Carolina's pioneering initiative established in 1993 to build a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system statewide. The initiative offers children birth to age five a range of services with the goal of enabling children to enter school healthy and ready for success.

Background. Smart Start is a public-private partnership at both the state and local levels. The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC) has state-level oversight and administrative responsibilities. At the local level, Smart Start funds are administered through nonprofit organizations called local partnerships, which are independent 501c3 organizations. Local partnerships share a common mission but make their own decisions on how best to meet the needs of children and families in their communities. Each partnership has its own leadership and locally-developed plan to fulfill its mission.

At Smart Start's inception, 12 local partnerships were started for 18 counties. Today, 80 local partnerships serve all 100 North Carolina counties.

Smart Start is funded through public dollars drawn from the state's general fund. NCPC allocates funds to local partnerships based on a formula that weighs local needs and existing resources. In addition, NCPC and

local partnerships must raise an annual ten percent match from non-state sources.

Legislation mandates that at least 70% of Smart Start funding be spent on child care or child care-related services (at least 30% must be spent on child care subsidies). The remaining 30% must address other issues affecting children birth to five and their families, such as family support and health care. But within those broad guidelines, partnerships can make their own programmatic decisions. Local partnerships typically contract with existing human service agencies to provide services. If no appropriate agency is available, the partnership may provide the service itself.

State Structure and Role. Established in the 1993 Smart Start authorizing legislation, NCPC is the statewide nonprofit organization charged with the initiative's administration and implementation. NCPC also has oversight, monitoring, and technical assistance responsibilities for local partnerships. All Smart Start funds pass through NCPC, and NCPC raises additional funds and is a key player in state-level early childhood planning and system building. Specifically, NCPC has these responsibilities:

- Accountability: programmatic and financial monitoring

- Capacity-building: technical assistance, training, best practices
- State-level systems: statewide early childhood system building
- Public awareness: statewide public awareness, promotion
- Sustainability: development, capacity building for local partnerships
- Operational: policies and procedures, personnel, evaluation

NCPC has a board of directors that includes legislative and gubernatorial appointees, and state agency, business, foundation, and early childhood program representatives. The NCPC board sets policies and procedures related to local partnership operations.

A Local Partnership Advisory Committee (LPAC), which includes eight local partnership board chairs and seven executive directors, is a liaison and policymaking voice between local partnerships and NCPC. Two LPAC members sit on the NCPC Board.

Three additional entities provide state government oversight. First, the state legislature provides policy oversight and reviews fiscal operations and program priorities. NCPC reports to the legislature annually. Second, the Office of the State Auditor conducts annual NCPC financial and compliance audits, and every two years audits local partnerships. Third, from 1993 to 2002, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill evaluated Smart Start programs. Currently no statewide evaluation is in place, but all partnerships are required to have local evaluation plans. In addition, the Performance-Based Incentive System (PBIS) measures local partnership progress

annually on key measures related to early care and education, family support, health and administration.

Local Structure and Role. Because North Carolina’s service delivery system is county-based, creating partnerships at that level was essential. Each local partnership has an executive director and board of directors made up of community members drawn from the service sector (health, social services, and mental health), K-12 education, county and city government, child care, business, faith-based organizations, and parents.

Smart Start was established to emphasize local control and decision making. Local partnerships originally were given authority over their Smart Start allocation each year and were told to “go forth and do creative things” for young children and families. As a result, each local partnership went in a different direction, and it became difficult to measure or even talk about statewide outcomes.

Today, Smart Start still emphasizes local decision making, but the emphasis is on *local flexibility* rather than local control. Local partnerships develop annual plans that dictate how Smart Start funds will be spent. Plans aim to create a system of services that builds on existing services and fills in gaps as needed. NCPC and state agency administrators review partnership plans and aid system building efforts by identifying additional funding, technical assistance, and opportunities for coordination.

Field staff and program specialists help local partnerships meet performance-based incentive standards. In 1996, the state’s General Assembly mandated a performance

measurement system for local partnerships. By July 2002, this system, known as the Performance-Based Incentive System (PBIS), was implemented statewide. Standards are applied statewide and use state-level data sources to measure individual partnership progress.

Local partnership plans must connect to these state performance-based measures and partnerships must have their own evaluation plan. Each year local partnerships get a report card showing their progress on the measures. Partnerships must show annual progress on measures or receive intensive technical assistance from NCPC and face the possibility of losing spending flexibility. If partnerships meet performance requirements, however, they earn greater flexibility in their spending and can broaden their programming.

Communication. NCPC and local partnerships communicate through numerous mechanisms that include:

Executive director forums: NCPC holds quarterly meetings for executive directors, lasting a day and a half. They offer an opportunity for collective problem solving and learning.

Conferences: An annual Smart Start conference offers workshops on a range of programmatic, financial, and organizational issues. They include participants from North Carolina as well as other states.

Smart.Net: NCPC has a password-protected area of its website known as Smart.Net which serves as the primary communication vehicle for information from local partnerships to NCPC. The

site includes all statewide communications and a state calendar. Local partnerships also use Smart.Net to share information with one another, and electronic listservs also are in place for executive directors, program coordinators, and evaluators.

Information highway: NCPC holds meetings and trainings on the Information Highway, a videoconferencing network.

Mentor partnerships: During the early stages in the development of Smart Start, new local partnerships received a “veteran” partnership to serve as a mentor to the new executive director and board. Now that Smart Start is statewide, efforts are made to pair veteran executive directors with new ones. Much informal mentoring also occurs across partnerships on a variety of organizational and programmatic issues.

Technical Assistance. Technical assistance and training needs across partnerships are broad and diverse. Topics include accounting, program monitoring, evaluation, organizational development, board development, strategic planning, collaboration, fundraising, and community outreach and engagement.

Smart Start invests heavily in technical assistance for local partnerships in order to ensure quality on-the-ground programming and financial accountability. NCPC field staff and program specialists provide technical. Consultants are also used for more specific and targeted assistance.

Field staff are the primary liaisons between local partnerships and NCPC, and ensure the

capacity of local partnerships in their regions. Each field staff member serves a region of 10-12 local partnerships.

Program specialists in the areas of early childhood, family support, and health work closely with field staff in reviewing whether local partnerships' plans will get required results. They also provide technical assistance and training, and assist with collaboration at the state level. Each program specialist has an advisory committee in his or her area of expertise that includes representatives from state government, nonprofit organizations, business, and local partnerships. Advisory committees help build collaboration, share project information, consider potential barriers to service delivery at the state and local level, and propose new or changed policies and programs to support early childhood system building.

Other NCPC departments also help build local partnership capacity. Development assists partnerships in strengthening fundraising, Information Technology offers computer-related training and supports the statewide accounting system, Public Information develops templates and common messages and offers TA on advocacy and media strategies, Human Resources answers questions on personnel issues, and Finance trains on financial management, contract monitoring and compliance.

While technical assistance and training are mostly individualized for local partnerships, programs across partnerships include:

Executive director and board chair orientation: Quarterly orientations offer new executive directors and board chairs

a brief course on Smart Start, legislative and NCPC requirements, NCPC structure, resources available to support local work, NCPC staff introductions, and key position responsibilities.

Regional training and technical assistance: Given the state's size, regional trainings are necessary to ensure greater participation in Smart Start trainings. They also facilitate networking among the partnerships.

Collaboration training: NCPC offers new local partnerships a series of collaboration seminars, along with a one-year coach to assist them as their programs develop.

Capacity-building program: NCPC has a technical assistance needs assessment tool to rate a partnership's level of "need" based on a variety of factors. In previous years, partnerships with greater needs participated in NCPC's capacity-building program and received a grant at the program's conclusion to fund programmatic plans developed. The program included seminars by national experts in such topics as comprehensive systems, family support, diversity, quality care, professional development, and needs assessments and community planning.

Performance improvement plans: Local partnerships that receive a low rating on the technical assistance needs assessment tool (or receive 3 or more findings on their annual audit) are required to participate in a customized improvement plan. This plan includes both fiscal and programmatic

requirements and is supported by technical assistance.

With such broad-reaching technical assistance responsibilities, NCPC is challenged to maintain sufficient capacity to oversee and manage the work of local partnerships. It took NCPC many years to develop the necessary capacity and infrastructure for this work, and NCPC now recommends that other states create the system they want at the beginning and not try to retrofit it.

Advocacy. Local partnerships contribute regularly to state-level advocacy to help ensure Smart Start growth and sustainability. Partnerships operate local networks of advocates that continually talk to state legislators to inform them about what services are essential and why funding must continue.

Successes. Smart Start's original intent was to build a comprehensive early childhood system at both the local and state levels. When the initiative began, many services across the state were nonexistent, fragmented, or low quality. The vision was for Smart Start funding to leverage the resources needed to coordinate existing services and add to them as necessary. While system building progress is incremental, Smart Start believes it has made significant progress in every county.

Most local partnerships have concentrated system building on creating a solid infrastructure of services and consolidating and integrating different parts of the system. Typical examples include:

- Making child care affordable by consolidating child care subsidy funding

through a single agency (e.g., child care resource and referral agencies)

- Enhancing child care quality by supporting education and professional development, offering financial rewards for quality improvements, providing customized technical assistance, or offering subsidy incentives
- Funding preschool through multiple funding streams (e.g., Head Start, Title I, Smart Start, state child care subsidies)
- Offering parenting education programs
- Improving access to child health, dental care, and vision services by weaving together existing services and developing programs that fill in gaps.
- Co-locating services to improve access and provide one-stop shopping.

Smart Start credits its state-local structure as a key factor in its system building success. The state-local structure contributes to system building in these ways:

- Local partnerships with decision making authority provide the flexibility required for successful local-level system building. A cookie-cutter approach imposed by the state with a set of predetermined programs would not have worked. In a diverse state, programs had to be designed strategically to respond to the diverse needs and resources within each community.
- The local partnership structure allows for better leveraging of funds because local partners work together to create a system that best fits their realities. Local partners blend funding and raise new funds for plans they helped create and therefore buy into.

- Local-level collaboration and change acts as a bottom-up push for state-level change. Partnership plans and successes often force the state to examine and adjust its policies to encourage resource sharing and local efficiencies.
- State programs are more successful because the local partnership structure helps to ensure quality service delivery and implementation. For example, the state's 5-star child care licensing system has been successful because efforts to build quality began at the local level. Providers were not as intimidated when the state set higher quality standards because they already were meeting them or thought they were attainable. Recently, North Carolina raised its quality standards again without conflict, because local partnerships had already helped child care centers meet the higher standards.
- Local partnerships help the state to get feedback on what works and what does not. This decreases the likelihood that the state will impose programs and policies without getting broad input and support first.

Challenges. While Smart Start has seen much success in its 13 years, advancing system-building efforts and changes can still be challenging and incremental. For example, despite sizable and long-term appropriations, the initiative has never been fully funded. Many partnerships operate with half or less of their projected funding needs, and budget cuts in other human service areas have hampered the ability to leverage support and build systems at both the state and local levels.

Also, despite the efforts of local partnerships to force bottom-up change, state and federal policy often does not support local system building. The large state agencies that fund education, health, and other services typically set their own policies. When there is overlap, agencies do not talk to one another to coordinate their own policies and regulations. System change moves faster when efforts are both top-down and bottom-up.

Lessons. As one of the first and longest-running statewide early childhood system building initiatives, Smart Start offers valuable lessons about building structures and relationships at the state and local levels that will contribute to system building.

Build flexibility into the design. Give communities the opportunities to develop programs and systems that best fit their needs and realities.

Require collaboration and don't go it alone. Find committed partners who can share resources and talents, and acknowledge that building relationships can take time.

Fund local-level infrastructure. This is not a volunteer effort; infrastructure is needed to make collaboration and system-building efforts successful.

Set performance goals early and determine how they will be measured. If statewide data sources do not already exist, create them to provide for both aggregated state-level data and data on local communities.

While still taking a comprehensive approach, focus on one part of the system first where there may be great need and great potential for change.

Success in one area (e.g., child care, preschool, health, family support), can be both a model and motivation for success in another.

Use multiple strategies to improve system parts. Do not just think about

filling in service gaps, but also look at problems holistically and think about issues of quality, access, affordability, and governance.

Do not be afraid of the politics. State investments are necessary for success. Getting those investments requires engaging in the politics. Build an advocacy network at the local level from the very beginning.

Oklahoma

Since 2003, Smart Start Oklahoma has been strengthening the state's system-building work in the areas of early childhood and school readiness. The initiative seeks to make better use of programs and resources that already exist, and facilitates collaboration among local service providers to achieve a more coordinated system that more effectively serves families with young children.

Background. Three entities are unified in their early childhood system-building efforts under the name Smart Start Oklahoma:

The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR or the Partnership) was legislatively established in 2003 to promote school readiness in Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation was established by the same 2003 legislation and is a 10-member board of private citizens that fundraises in the private sector to support the Partnership's work statewide and locally.

In addition to the Partnership, whose venue includes the entire state of

Oklahoma, system building in early childhood is occurring locally in 16 sites across the state that serve about 65% of the state's children under six.

Oklahoma Smart Start goals include:

- Oklahoma families nurture, teach and provide for their young children
- All Oklahoma children will be born healthy and remain healthy
- Families with young children are able to find and afford high-quality child care when needed
- All Oklahoma children enter school prepared to learn and continue to succeed.

Smart Start works to achieve these goals by focusing on policy and systems development, public awareness and engagement, community mobilization, and resource development and sustainability.

State Structure and Role. OPSR has 29 appointed board members that include 13 state agency directors and 16 private sector individuals. The Partnership is charged with coordinating early learning programming at

both the state and local levels for purposes of increasing effectiveness and cost-efficiency. OPSR receives and raises funds and establishes guidelines for disbursing those funds. Currently, OPSR has \$2 million in funding from the state legislature to support the state office and local sites.

No other state funding flows through local Smart Start sites. Representatives from other funding streams such as the child care subsidy system and child welfare are involved both locally and at the state level and this helps with collaboration among these different fund streams.

Oklahoma Smart Start also requires a 10% community match, which can be in-kind or cash based. This encourages local buy-in and the 10% goal is generally attainable due to the ability to include in-kind support (e.g., office space).

Local Structure and Role. Smart Start was formed on a solid foundation of preexisting partnerships and systems in Oklahoma communities. Local expertise and engagement has informed state system building, as local sites have provided solid evidence of programming and outcomes that reflect the need for coordination and collaboration at the state and local levels.

Prior to OPSR's formation, local system-building work was done locality-by-locality. Oklahoma Smart Start represents a movement toward coordinated local networking and state-level early childhood system building and governance. This move was a major change in the state and its impacts are still being seen and addressed locally. The change, however, was seen as necessary for Oklahoma to move forward.

Local partnership boards and sites tend to have an open-door policy to attract a wide range of stakeholders from, for example, the public school system, social services, child care providers and licensing, libraries, business leaders, parents, and faith-based and other charitable organizations. Local sites create their own local by-laws regarding membership and day-to-day operations. Some OPSR board members also sit on their local Smart Start boards, although there is no official designation calling for their representation.

Most sites are single counties or cities, with one site encompassing three counties. The city-specific sites often are working toward greater inclusion, collaboration, and coordination county-wide, and some are open to the idea of becoming a county-wide site if greater resources become available.

Some of the 16 local sites were in place prior to the Partnership. Six were in place due to United Way of America's Success by Six Initiative. The number of sites expanded to twelve in 2002 through support from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. The first six sites were formed themselves for the initial designation process based on needs, past partnerships, or capacity. Oklahoma recognizes that some past system building success came because strong programs were already in place locally. Now a statewide system-building effort is needed to bring system-building together and improve coordination and sharing of resources and ideas.

Some Oklahoma Smart Start sites serve as their own fiscal agent by forming their own 501c3. They also use the 501c3 status to fundraise locally. Other sites have local nonprofits—such as the local Child Care

Resource and Referral or United Way—act as their fiscal agent and the coordinator is an employee of that agency.

Local sites all have a local Smart Start coordinator to staff the work. In the past some coordinators were voluntary positions. Now, all are paid positions. Oklahoma describes this move as critical to success and necessary for serious and ongoing system building efforts.

Sites have the authority to strategize and put together a local plan and funding request. The OPSR (through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services since the OPSR is not a formal agency) approves budgets and plans for funding. The OPSR sets priorities that help to guide that decision making process. Additionally, the site’s population and where it is in the implementation process is considered. While local sites are given flexibility and control over the funding requests and areas of focus, the state-level Partnership has ultimate approval. Sites must defend their position and convince the state of their needs locally. While the state has ultimate authority over funding, decisions are driven by the communities’ needs.

As the new structure has taken shape, requirements have changed for local sites, primarily in the areas of reporting and monitoring of progress. Data collection from local sites has increased in sophistication. Examples include a more coordinated staff evaluation and outcome measurement system and requirements than were in place prior to the formation of Smart Start Oklahoma.

The state also has established some requirements for local sites, including some

mandatory activities such as the Raising a Reader program. This program supports the importance of reading for parents of young children through information and providing high quality children’s books that can be exchanged weekly for new ones. This program began at the Stillwater site and due to its success is now required for all Smart Start local sites. In addition, also consistent across the sites is involvement with the Born Learning Campaign, which provides information to parents regarding “teachable moments” through billboards, television spots, and printed pieces. Finally, a Kindergarten survey for Kindergarten teachers to measure school readiness is conducted statewide.

Local coordinators report that the state has done a good job of providing access to these evidence-based programs at the local level by making them mandatory and that these programs have built-in flexibility to work across local sites. Other requirements include an annual review, updated strategic plan, and in-person grant review with OPSR representatives, community assessments, and local outcomes.

While some discussion has taken place about scaling Smart Start statewide, some challenges exist around this move. Concern exists over how this might impact already-existing sites and the flexibility they depend on. Remaining areas in the state are less “ready” for system-building work and would be more difficult to develop, with a lack of already existing early childhood relationships, capacity, and partnerships that would dilute what was happening already.

Communication. OPSR has tried to avoid a top-down approach by listening to sites and involving them when possible. The state

board pays attention to local priorities and strategies during sites' planning work. Local coordinators are also surveyed and serve on some short-term ad hoc committees.

While the importance of state-level system building is obvious to sites, some local sites feel they do not have the time to communicate often with the state-level board and they currently rely on state-level Smart Start staff to do so. Both state and local representatives feel the need for improvement in the ability of the state-level OPSR board to fully appreciate all that is going on at the local level in Oklahoma. Greater local representation on the state board is a potential way to increase this communication. However, permanent official board involvement is potentially problematic because OPSR makes funding decisions regarding local sites and the potential for conflicts of interest exist. Even with that potential, a more formalized role for local representatives on the state-level board is desired by some sites. Having a non-coordinator local representative fill that position may be a way to avoid conflict of interest issues.

Oklahoma is working to strengthen the direct communication between the local sites and the state Partnership. In many ways, local sites are farther ahead on early childhood system building than the state. Local sites are sharing ideas and information with the OPSR board, such as ways to keep board members engaged that have worked well locally.

Local site coordinators participate in quarterly meetings and bimonthly conference calls to share ideas and problems, and to report on local successes. Also, a community newsletter is distributed

every other month with best practices on community mobilization, collaboration and early childhood. A Funding and Research Newsletter is distributed every other month. Local coordinators also attend the annual national Smart Start conference in North Carolina, with support from Smart Start Oklahoma.

In addition, there has been significant informal peer-to-peer networking. Local sites know who to call when they need help or advice, and they take the initiative to make those contacts among themselves. For instance, Bartlesville has had much success working with local businesses, and the Stillwater site introduced the Raising a Reader program. Much local site development has come from peer-to-peer interactions, making this piece central to success and movement ahead. The state-level staff also aid in this process by sharing successes between sites and connecting coordinators when interaction in some areas would be helpful. Prior to Smart Start, state-level work, collaboration and coordination was done locally but not statewide.

Technical Assistance. Technical assistance is provided one-on-one to local sites as well as during the quarterly directors' meetings and during peer-to-peer opportunities for sites that have shown success in specific areas who can share with other sites needing guidance or help. These meetings are held at a central location and are led by state-level Smart Start staff.

Local sites receive technical assistance in areas such as coalition building, public engagement, strategic planning, assessment and evaluation, grant writing, advocacy, subcontracting requirements and collaboration. The sites are all in very

different places with respect to assessments, planning and implementation, and have different technical assistance needs.

Advocacy. Local sites can impact state-level policy in various ways. Information can go through OPSR, and that system is a work in progress.

Local sites also have had some success educating their local legislators or county representatives. Sites invite legislators to local events and activities, participate in press conferences at the legislature organized by Smart Start, and keep information flowing whenever possible. Legislators are very aware of the local efforts in the state and this has helped in securing funding for the current OPSR efforts. While impacting state policy might not be an expressed Smart Start goal, public education is, and this can and does impact policy.

Local coordinators are increasingly comfortable advocating at the state level and being in touch with their local legislators, although some take on this role and some do not. Some local coordinators engage in advocacy, but do so as individuals and not as Smart Start coordinators.

Successes. Communities have followed both common and varied paths to building local early learning systems. At the same time, local sites have taken many actions and experienced successes. These often are seen as building blocks for further work and development. Specific actions include work in community education and awareness, new program implementation, and service system coordination and reform. For example:

- The Stillwater site has instigated the Angels program that provides trained substitute child care workers for programs in their areas.
- At the Norman site, the City Council decrees a day for Early Childhood Awareness every year as part of the public engagement work. Other sites such as Ada, Lawton, Muskogee and Pottawatomie County also have public awareness activities in place.
- Guthrie has funded a child-focused librarian who works on early literacy at a small local library that did not have this capacity previously.
- Guthrie has also implemented a parent help line where experts with insights regarding local and state programming can connect parents with those services.
- Sites have coordinated support for professional development, such as the Bartlesville site and their work with the local Rotary Club to fund providers as they work on their Child Development Associate credential.
- Several sites collaborate with local school districts, such as Durant's work to establish Parents as Teachers programming through the local district or Oklahoma City's work to provide family resource rooms in public school buildings.
- Other sites, such as Norman, have partnered with local pediatricians and their local health departments to provide books and on site immunization at child care centers or dental screenings in Ponca City
- Stillwater has worked with local business and city officials to build a community playground.
- Some sites also provide technical assistance, such as the Tulsa site, which

aids child care sites attempting to achieve NAEYC accreditation

Challenges. As state-level system planning moves ahead it is assumed that the funding process will become more competitive and more closely tied to performance at the local level. In addition, state-level authority and recommendations may also increase as work continues to implement a statewide systems agenda and strategic plan for a comprehensive early childhood statewide system. The state-level priorities and how those will impact local-level priorities and decision making is not clear to local sites yet. Oklahoma is working to iron out this system and to determine how much authority the state will have in future local planning efforts. Currently, the consensus seems to be that state priorities are reflective of local priorities or at least flexible enough that sites can continue with their local work under the new priority suggestions.

Lessons. During its first three years, ideas or lessons have emerged from the ongoing system building work in Oklahoma including:

Communities know best what they need. Making sure there is a local voice and strategy is key to planning success and for recruitment of local passionate champions. Business and economic development arguments are best made locally rather than statewide. It is easier to convince the media or form positive relationships with local media than having statewide officials attempt to make that connection. Relationship building at the local level is key to both statewide and local success.

Make sure that early childhood is represented in all areas of local decision making and planning. For example, one site has a Smart Start representative sitting on the local festival planning committee. The point is to make sure the community sees the early childhood focus as a part of all community planning and work. The community should be encouraged to always keep in mind the impact that planning has on young children and their families.

Be aware of opposition. Conservative groups in Oklahoma opposed early childhood program funding, which they have called the “nanny state.” Advocates were slow to respond at first but now have formed better relationships with the local press and community groups, allowing them to better disseminate their point of view. Local sites need technical assistance in this area and support from state system-building efforts to address the opposition locally as well as statewide. Related to this is the importance of including and educating the faith community regarding early childhood to try to counteract potential or existing opposition.

Cultivate business champions. Oklahoma has had substantial success in this arena. This work is all about champions, who are passionate and educated about the issue and can inspire others. Some corporate leaders have great influence with policymakers and can be passionate advocates. This is true at both the local and state level.

Frame the issue in a comprehensive way right from the start. Use a family support approach or being “ready to learn” rather

than focusing on child care and even early childhood education. Some Oklahoma sites began their work through Child Care Resource and Referral entities, which provoked opposition in some corners and was a narrower agenda that did not activate all potential champions.

Remind sites of their role to plan, coordinate, and fill in small gaps in the early childhood system locally—not become service providers. Focusing too much on individual programs does not allow the local group to serve as an umbrella organization for all service providers, leaders and stakeholders to be

involved with and to share credit for early childhood advances and programming.

Use a comprehensive early childhood approach. Oklahoma began with a comprehensive focus, bringing to the table representatives from business, faith community, health, mental health and other areas in addition to child care and education. This broad approach allowed preexisting local structures to remain intact as their work evolved. It also allowed them to use this new umbrella to bring their unique experiences and insights together to form a statewide early learning system.

Vermont

Building Bright Futures seeks to improve outcomes for Vermont’s children under six years of age by aligning the state’s early childhood programs, policies, and resources and promoting collective accountability for the early childhood care, health, and education system. Like many states, early childhood programs and services in Vermont have diverse forms and funding streams. Often, planning and resource allocation is uncoordinated and communities have few opportunities for input, particularly at the state level. Building Bright Futures seeks to remedy this with a comprehensive system-building effort that is aligned at both the state and local levels.

For the past several years, Building Bright Futures has been in a planning and early start-up phase. The effort now is at a critical juncture, poised to move from planning to implementation. The following describes Vermont’s system-building efforts to date

and how Building Bright Futures is expected to look and function in the future.

Background. Vermont has a long history of working to establish an integrated and coordinated early childhood system. In 1992, the Early Childhood Work Group, a loose association of parents, providers, child advocates, and state agency managers, formed to develop a plan for coordinating Vermont’s early care, health and education system. This group, which continues to meet today, laid the foundation for the state’s system building efforts. While it was an important beginning, the Early Childhood Work Group recognized its limitations as a loose collaborative in achieving a system vision.

In 2002, Vermont received a grant from the North Carolina Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center to help further system planning efforts. Ultimately, this process resulted in a plan for a new initiative

and public-private partnership called Building Bright Futures to coordinate and oversee the state's early childhood care, health, and education system.

In 2004, Governor James Douglas issued an executive order establishing the Building Bright Futures Transitional Board to continue the planning process. The Board was to develop recommendations for an entity to manage and direct Building Bright Futures and recommend legislation to establish it.⁵ Using already-existing early childhood system planning as a guide, the Transitional Board also was to develop policies and procedures to govern system building at the state and local levels and resolve concerns over departmental authority.

After meeting for a year, in early 2006 the Transitional Board approved its Building Bright Futures plan. The plan outlined the state and local entities to be created and their roles and responsibilities, but left room for other details to evolve over time.

Ultimately the goal is to establish the plan's elements in legislation. The Transitional Board decided this year, however, to take an interim step and request a second short-term executive order creating a Building Bright Futures entity at the state level that advises the Governor. The rationale is that by first launching the state-level entity and building progress and momentum, the case for broader legislation that also establishes local entities will be strengthened. The Governor issued the two-year executive order in June 2006.

For now, little new funding has been requested. Vermont is focusing less on securing new funds for Building Bright

Futures and more on redirecting existing funds. The rationale is that while a need exists for new monies in the early childhood system as a whole, those dollars do not necessarily need to flow through Building Bright Futures for system building to occur. This position may change, however, as efforts develop and specific system-related funding needs surface (e.g., improving data collection, evaluation, and reporting).

Funds to date for planning and early start up have come from the Department for Children and Families, state appropriations (\$100,000 last fiscal year and this year), and some federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant dollars.⁶ Funds supported a Building Bright Futures executive director, state-level planning, and some local-level development (explained later).

State Structure and Role. The Transitional Board's plan calls for a State Council to oversee Building Bright Futures. The state council will have 19 appointed members. Five members will be state agency or department heads from the Agency of Human Services, Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Department of Health, Department of Education, and Department for Children and Families. Other members will include two legislators (one each from the House and Senate), two business representatives, a public early education teacher or administrator, a private early education provider, a child or family doctor, a United Way director, a school board member, a parent, and two at-large members.

The state council will:

- Support the creation of an integrated system of early childhood care, health, and education
- Develop a statewide plan for coordinating and integrating early childhood services
- Advise the administration on the system's status and needs
- Promote the integration of agency and departmental budgets
- Ensure every region in Vermont develops a Building Bright Futures council and receives technical assistance as needed
- Develop a common reporting system for statewide outcomes
- Address policies and regulations that pose barriers in serving families
- Pursue adequate system funding from the private and public sector
- Affiliate with other organizations as necessary.

The state council will meet at least four times a year and report annually to the governor.⁷ The council will have a strong working committee structure on critical systems issues. The specific committee structure is still evolving, but will address the following issues:

Coordination: Overseeing state-local communications, meeting agendas, committee assignments, and responding to committee work plans. Members will come from all other committees.

Operations: Overseeing the state council budget, collaborate with other organizations, and manage personnel issues and operating policies.

Data and evaluation: Dealing with issues regarding evaluation, data collection, reporting, use of best practices, and needs assessment at the state and local levels.

Professional preparation and development: Supporting development of a quality and coordinated professional development system for providers.

Public engagement: Coordinating state and local communications strategies, and connecting with advocacy groups as appropriate.

Finance/Resources: Addressing finance and spending issues, including Building Bright Futures budget development and new funding opportunities.

Families/Parents: Ensuring parent perspectives inform system building.

Regional Councils: Connecting the state and regional councils (regional councils explained below), and making recommendations to the state council on governance, policy, and implementation.

Vermont has yet to decide on its approach for developing a public entity to staff and support Building Bright Futures (like the North Carolina Partnership for Children). Because Vermont statutes restrict the entity from being an independent 501c3 organization, it may be affiliated with an already-existing nonprofit.

Local Structure and Role. Similar to work happening at the state level, over the last decade a vision and infrastructure for local-level early childhood system building has been developing in Vermont with support from the Agency of Human Services. Local efforts in each of the Agency’s twelve regional districts have included:

Success by Six—The state’s comprehensive early childhood initiative established in 1994. Vermont communities have a common set of child outcomes to work toward, but develop their own priorities and projects to achieve them, such as parent education workshops, welcome baby visits, or parent scholarships for parenting workshops.

Early Childhood Councils—Formed in the mid-1990s to address system issues at the local level and help ensure community involvement in early childhood program and service planning and delivery. Many Success by Six coordinators lead the councils.

Regional Partnerships—Collaborative groups that develop and implement local strategies for improving the child, family, and individual well-being, and make communities healthier places to live. Partnerships engage diverse community members, and mobilize community resources to enhance local support services and systems. Early childhood is one focus of many that regional partnerships consider. Partnerships evaluate their own needs and priorities, and develop projects to address them.

While Vermont has a tradition of encouraging communities to make collaborative decisions about how best to serve children and families, until now, local efforts have not had a direct connection to state system-building efforts and the two lacked an overarching strategy. Building Bright Futures will provide that strategy and attempt to connect state and local efforts.

Early childhood councils will transition into Regional Building Bright Futures Councils that coordinate and integrate local programs, collect outcome data, and communicate with the state council. While existing early childhood councils help address system issues, their membership and roles vary by region. In addition, some focus more on early care and education than other system areas like health. With the transition, the councils’ makeup and functions will be more consistent. The state council will develop guidelines for regional council membership, and councils will supplement membership as needed. The state appropriated \$100,000 last fiscal year that was re-granted to help local entities prepare for this development.

Full-time executive directors will head the regional councils. Success by Six coordinator dollars will be combined with new dollars to form these new positions. Directors will be responsible for local-level planning, determining service gaps and duplications, and facilitating alignment and integration agreements.

Regional council responsibilities will mirror many of the state council’s. Regional councils will:

- Support the creation of an integrated system of early childhood care, health, and education at the local level
- Develop a regional plan for coordinating and integrating early childhood services
- Advise the state council on the local system’s strengths and needs
- Identify policy and regulation barriers and recommendations for addressing them
- Track, analyze, and report on outcomes (coordinated across regions)
- Affiliate with local groups representing area businesses and employers.

Each regional council will report annually to the state council, detailing outcomes and progress in system-building efforts. In addition, as described earlier, a regional committee will act as a liaison between the regional councils and state council.⁸

Communication. Historically in Vermont, early childhood system-building efforts at the state and local levels have not been formally linked. Building Bright Futures will forge that connection and establish formal communications between the two.

The state council’s regional councils committee will be the main vehicle for state and local communication. Members will include select state council representatives along with two representatives from each regional council—the regional council executive director and a council participant. This committee will make recommendations to the state council on governance, policy, and implementation issues.

Once the state and regional councils are established, other communication

mechanisms will emerge to promote peer-to-peer information sharing and learning.

Technical Assistance. The state council’s responsibilities include ensuring regional councils have the technical assistance they need. The process and content of such technical assistance will evolve when the state council is established and begins assessing local needs. The public entity that staffs Building Bright Futures will likely play a role in delivering technical assistance.

Advocacy. Public engagement will be a major Building Bright Futures focus, as the current system of services can be confusing to families, service providers, legislators, and the general public. Building Bright Futures will give Vermont’s early childhood service delivery system a recognizable name and identity. The state council’s public engagement committee will work with marketing experts to create messaging and branding that can be used at the state and local levels. In addition, the public engagement committee will work with the regional councils committee to develop integrated communications planning.

Regional councils also will advocate with policymakers. The regional council committee will provide an opportunity for regional councils to communicate directly with high-level state administrators (and at least two legislators) who have the authority to make important policy and funding changes.

The connection between Building Bright Futures and existing statewide child advocacy efforts such as Vermont’s Kids are Priority One and the Vermont’s Children’s Forum is still evolving. The state council’s public engagement committee will engage with advocacy groups for educational

advocacy purposes. In addition, regional council members will likely participate in state-level advocacy to give legislators a clearer picture of communities' early childhood service and system needs.

Lessons. While Building Bright Futures has yet to be fully implemented, many lessons have emerged about putting a system-building plan in place at the state and local levels.

Involvement of state agency heads may be important for success. With the Building Bright Futures state council, Vermont is developing a state-level entity that includes the heads of major state agencies and mandates their participation. While some other states have focused more on middle-level administrators, Vermont is taking a different tact. They see agency heads as having the authority to make significant and sustainable changes in the early childhood system. In addition, their experience with the Transitional Board has shown that high-level administrators will participate and contribute.

Getting high-level state buy-in requires education, and at times, compromise. During earlier stages of the planning process, Vermont was using the term “unified” when describing system-building goals. Eventually they stopped using this term, as it caused state agency heads to be concerned about what funding and authority they had to give up for Building Bright Futures. While they supported system building conceptually, they were apprehensive about its implications. To address this, the Transitional Board was presented with a continuum of options for where they wanted to take their work. On one

end was the state’s current status. On the other end was a single state department responsible for all early childhood programs, funding, and services. Transitional Board members chose their target together, at a point in the continuum’s middle. While some may have picked a different point on the continuum, this exercise helped alleviate concerns and get the buy-in necessary to move forward.

It is not necessary to have the whole system figured out up front. Vermont discovered, in fact, that figuring out too much too early may cause participants to opt out of the process too soon. For example, they found their first early childhood system plan, drafted before the Transitional Board was formed, was too detailed to get full buy-in once the Transitional Board was in place. The plan was eventually redrafted to allow for evolution and growth over time.

Executive orders can be useful for setting system-building in motion. Vermont used an executive order in 2002 to establish the Building Bright Futures Transitional Board and move system-planning efforts forward. Another executive order is now being sought to establish the state council. While executive orders have tradeoffs in that they can be unfunded mandates and can carry restrictions, they also have advantages. For example, if the political or economic climate is not amenable to new legislation that supports system building, an executive order can signal progress and the intent to move forward. In addition, progress made under an executive order can help build a stronger case for future legislation.

Notes

¹ The McKnight Foundation created the Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs) in 1986 as independent nonprofit foundations that provide services and grantmaking in six regions outside of the Twin Cities. They were founded to focus greater attention on the needs of rural Minnesota, and to encourage local responsibility for Greater Minnesota's long-term welfare. The MIFs each have their own board of directors and bring people in their respective regions together to identify and address challenges and priorities. MIFs typically support human services, economic and community development, leadership development, and community capacity building. They make grants and loans, develop partnerships, and support training and other forms of development. The McKnight Foundation supports the regional foundations, but MIFs also stimulate and leverage additional giving from local donors; local, state, and national governments; and other foundations.

² MIFs include the 1) Initiative Foundation in Little Falls; 2) Northland Foundation in Duluth; 3) Northwest Minnesota Foundation in Bemidji, 4) Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation in Owatonna, 5) Southwest Initiative Foundation in Hutchinson, and 6) West Central Initiative in Fergus Falls.

³ Ready 4K also began with McKnight Foundation funding. The organization was formed in 2003 as a nonpartisan statewide campaign bringing people together across the state to raise awareness and advocate for policy change that makes children, age birth to five, a top priority in Minnesota.

⁴ Coordinators receive about \$5,000 a year.

⁵ Transitional Board members included the Secretaries of the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and Commerce and Community Development; Commissioners of the Department for Children and Families (under AHS), Department of Education, and Department of Health (under AHS); two legislators; three business representatives; three parents; one child advocate; two regional partnership representatives; and two Early Childhood Council representatives.

⁶ Building Bright Futures and ECCS efforts in Vermont are coordinated.

⁷ All members are required to attend at least 3 meetings per year. Commissioners are required to attend, while Secretaries can send designees.

⁸ A regional early childhood council committee already is in place and will transition into this role.

Key Points from a Survey of State and Community Leaders in Six States Developing State and Community Partnerships

by Charles Bruner, Julia Coffman, and Michelle Stover Wright

The following are key points from Chapter One.

All six states (Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Vermont) have taken an organic, “learn as you go” approach to building state and community partnerships, with evolving parameters regarding local roles.

States did not start with an overall blueprint that delineated state vs. community roles and responsibilities, but rather recognized the value of fostering community activity, experimentation, and learning along the way. Even in the longest standing initiatives, questions regarding the appropriate locus of decision-making authority and responsibility between state and community planning and governance on some issues continue to be developed. At the same time, initial direction from the state offered sufficient support, opportunity, encouragement and focus to foster local planning and enthusiasm.

Much of the early work in all states (at both the community and state levels) involved developing new collaborative relationships in visualizing an “early learning system,” identifying gaps in developing that system, and taking some specific steps to fill those gaps. The state commitment to support local planning energized and gave credibility to this local work.

While diverse in their approaches, all six states shared a number of common motivating factors for supporting community planning and governance.

All states recognized the limitations of designing an early learning system solely at the state level. Common among their

reasons for creating local planning and governance structures were:

- The need to develop more coordinated or integrated service delivery across health, early care and education, education, and other service systems, with the hands-on aspects of achieving this coordination ultimately dependent upon local collaboration.
- The need to establish joint commitment and responsibility to achieving better results for children from within existing categorical systems serving young children, again ultimately dependent upon local commitment and administration.
- The potential for developing early learning systems that are contoured to address the unique needs, cultures, and strengths of local communities, building upon local strengths.
- The opportunity to bring in new constituencies and enhance local involvement and leverage local resources.
- The need and opportunity to develop and test new models and strategies, best done first at a local level rather than through a statewide effort.

While diverse in their duration, state investment of resources, and selection of communities, the six states shared significant features they deemed important to their success.

All state and community leaders interviewed emphasized the value of developing state and community partnerships in building an early learning system. Leaders at the community level saw the state’s recognition that communities were in the best position to determine priorities for system building as

empowering and energizing their local work. In addition, both state and community leaders saw the following as key to success:

- An early emphasis upon and support for local community organizing and coalition building to bring the right partners to the table and create local ownership.
- Paid local staffing or administrative support to coordinate this work.
- Collaborative local planning and governing structures (e.g. partnerships, coalitions, councils) that included a cross-section of early childhood stakeholders who agreed to shared planning authority.
- Regular (at least quarterly) communication opportunities both among local efforts and between local and state entities.
- Mechanisms for local-level reporting and accountability, with an end goal of identifying results for children.
- Development of an advocacy link supporting local partners in how to advocate and coordinate advocacy messages.

State and community partnerships have produced a variety of specific accomplishments – some anticipated and some serendipitous – across a variety of areas.

While none of the states believe their actions have yet produced a fully developed and comprehensive early learning system, all cited significant accomplishments. These included the following, roughly listed in terms of their frequency of mention as significant positive change:

- Achieving better coordination and collaboration across local systems, with some braiding of funding and refocusing of existing services.
- Creating broader local awareness of and commitment to early learning, fostering community energy to define and address local needs and opportunities.
- Leveraging local resources (both financial and in-kind support) to fill system gaps and build upon local strengths.
- Increasing state and community communication and providing guidance back to the state to inform state management of resources and development of state policy.
- Creating a grassroots and grasstops advocacy base for state-level reforms and investments, including providing a base for sustainability across changes in political leadership at the state level.
- Drawing in voluntary support networks and systems to help young children and their families get what they need to support early learning.
- Serving as laboratories to test new ideas and aid in technology transfer across communities.
- Addressing particular issues of diversity, equity, and cultural congruence.

Experiences from these six states offer a number of “lessons learned” that may be applicable to efforts in all states to develop state and community partnerships.

The six states also shared a number of “lessons learned” in their work that have reflected their experiences in “learning as you go” and that can help inform work in other states in developing state and community partnerships. These lessons learned include the following:

- Birth to five (or eight) is an appropriate focus for community planning and governance.
- Community planning involves community learning and requires support for that learning (especially staffing) but can be developed in most communities, although with variability across individual communities.
- There is value in intentional peer-to-peer networking, but this often is not sufficiently resourced or supported at the state level.
- Incorporating “best practices” or “research-based” approaches into community planning requires an infrastructure that cannot be created solely at the community level.
- There is value in providing substantial, ongoing communications platforms between state and community.
- Reducing fragmentation usually is not so much about consolidating funding or “rule busting” as it is about recontouring and better coordinating existing services to better meet young child needs.
- Community ownership helps produce a political advocacy base and sustainability, particularly across changes in state political leadership.
- Complete devolution is not the answer – there is a role for state regulation and standards.
- Issues of race and class and culture do not naturally emerge by establishing local planning and governance structures but should be reflected in the composition of those structures to ensure they receive attention.

As the six states have evolved, there are a number of questions that remain or have been brought into sharper focus that require further work and examination in

developing effective state and community partnerships, as they are critical to developing a comprehensive early learning system.

The six states surveyed continue to grow their partnerships and serve as learning laboratories. As this work proceeds, new questions have arisen or been raised to prominence that require special consideration – particularly as more states work to develop state and community partnerships in building early learning systems:

- How much flexible funding do communities need to establish and sustain a community planning process?
- How far does the systemic focus need to go, as opposed to a programmatic and gap filling emphasis?
- How (and at what level – community or state) can the needed infrastructure to support quality be developed and maintained?
- In what ways can states and communities most effectively support and resource voluntary social networks?
- How can states and communities best provide voice and power to poor, immigrant, and minority families and their communities?

Building Connections Cross-State Summary Matrix

	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
Initiative name	Colorado Consolidated Child Care Pilot Programs	Iowa Community Empowerment Initiative	Minnesota Early Childhood Initiative	Smart Start North Carolina	Smart Start Oklahoma	Building Bright Futures
Years in Existence	9	8	3	13	3	Completing Planning
Age Focus	Birth to 5	Birth to 5	Birth to 5	Birth to 5	Birth to 5	Birth to 5
Early Childhood System Focus	Comprehensive early childhood focus	Comprehensive early childhood focus	Comprehensive early childhood focus	Comprehensive early childhood focus	Comprehensive early childhood focus	Comprehensive early childhood focus
How Established	Legislation	Legislation	Foundation Initiative	Legislation	Legislation	Executive Order (for planning phase)
Definition of “Local”	Single County or Multi-County	Single County or Multi-County	Counties or Cities	Single County and Multi-Counties	Single County, Multi-County, or Cities	Regional Agency of Human Services Districts
Geographic Reach	<u>17 pilots</u> serving 30 out of 64 counties—72% of Colorado’s population	<u>Statewide</u> 58 empowerment areas serving all 99 counties	<u>51 coalitions</u> serving 42 out of 80 MIF-served counties (MN has 87 counties)	<u>Statewide</u> 80 partnerships serving all 100 counties	<u>16 sites</u> serving 65% of Oklahoma’s children under 6 years	<u>Statewide</u> (proposed) 12 councils serving all of Vermont
Funding Source	<u>Federal Child Care Development Block Grant</u> (CCDBG) funds administered through the state Departments of Human Services and Education Additional support from <u>state and local public and private grants</u>	<u>State appropriation</u> and <u>TANF</u> funds administered through a state level department	Core funding from the <u>McKnight Foundation</u> , administered through <u>Minnesota Initiative Foundations</u> (MIFs) Additional support from <u>local sources</u> , including corporations and foundations	<u>State appropriation</u>	<u>State appropriation</u>	[For planning] State <u>Department for Children and Families</u> and <u>state appropriation</u> ; Additional planning support from federal <u>ECCS</u> and <u>private</u> funding sources

	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
Funding Amount	Each pilot's annual funding ranges from \$30,000 to \$100,000. The statewide total CCDBG investment is \$974,000	\$49 million for upcoming year	\$3.2 million from the McKnight Foundation for the first three years	\$190 million last fiscal year	\$2 million last fiscal year	[For planning] \$100,000 state appropriation last fiscal year plus Department for Children and Families funding
State (or Cross-Community) Structure	<p><u>Early Childhood and School Readiness Commission</u> created by the General Assembly, in partnership with the <u>Early Childhood State Systems Team</u> made up of state agencies and early childhood organizations</p> <p>Collaborative partnership between the Colorado <u>Department of Education and Department of Human Services</u>.</p>	<p><u>Iowa Empowerment Board</u> (as of July 2007) made up of 22 voting members, including State Department Directors, and 16 citizen governor appointees. Also, 6 non-voting Iowa General Assembly representatives sit on the Board.</p> <p><u>Early Childhood Iowa</u>, a state-level system building group of stakeholders from early care, health and education systems</p>	Six regional <u>Minnesota Initiative Foundations</u> , independent nonprofit foundations that provide services and grantmaking in six regions outside of the Twin Cities	<p><u>North Carolina Partnership for Children</u> (NCPC), a statewide nonprofit organization</p> <p><u>NCPC Board of Directors</u> which includes legislative and gubernatorial appointees, and state agency, business, foundation, and early childhood program representatives.</p>	<p><u>Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness</u> (OPSR), a board of 29 appointed members including 13 state agency directors and 16 private sector individuals</p> <p><u>OPSR Foundation</u>, a 10-member board of private citizens</p>	<u>State Building Bright Futures Council</u> , 19 appointed members including two state agency secretaries, three department commissioners, two legislators, two business representatives, a public and private school teacher or early care and education provider, child or family doctor, United Way director, school board member, and parent.

	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
State (or Cross-Community) Role	<p>The 3-year Commission studies, reviews, and evaluates plans for a comprehensive early childhood system.</p> <p>The ECSST is the ongoing planning arm for the developing early childhood system.</p> <p>State Departments of Education and Human Services provide oversight and approve pilot spending</p>	<p>The Empowerment Board provides oversight and approves how funds are spent. The State Empowerment Technical Assistance Team provides TA and other support.</p> <p>Early Childhood Iowa is building a state early childhood system and advises the Community Empowerment Board</p>	<p>MIFs provide oversight and approve how funds are spent. They select communities and work closely with them to build coalitions, participating in the process themselves by providing technical assistance throughout. MIFs provide funding to help implement coalition projects.</p>	<p>NCPC provides oversight and approves how funds are spent. NCPC also manages administrative and reporting policies and procedures, and provides technical assistance.</p> <p>The NCPC Board sets policies and procedures related to local partnership operations.</p>	<p>OSPR provides oversight and approves how funds are spent through the Department of Human Services.</p> <p>The OSPR Foundation fundraises in the private sector to support the work of the Partnership statewide and locally.</p>	<p>The State Council will provide oversight and be charged with planning, coordinating, integrating, and developing early childhood programs, policies, and resources at the state and regional levels.</p>
Local Structure/ Governance	<p><u>Early childhood councils</u> consisting of community leaders from early care and education, health, mental health, and family support; 3 pilots are 501c3 organizations</p>	<p><u>Local community empowerment boards</u> consist of citizens, elected officials, consumers, the faith community, the business community, representatives from human services, health and education systems and others locally decided upon</p>	<p><u>Early childhood coalitions</u> with members locally-decided; may include parents, elected officials, early childhood education, child care, K-12, postsecondary education, community and economic development, business, faith, media, law enforcement, health, and human services</p>	<p><u>Local partnerships</u> that are 501c3 organizations</p> <p>Local partnerships have boards of community members drawn from the service sector (health, social services, and mental health), K-12, county and city government, child care, business, faith-based organizations, and parents</p>	<p><u>Local public-private partnerships</u> made up of local stakeholders such as parents, business leaders, providers, representatives of the local school districts, or local non profit agencies, the faith community and others decided upon locally</p>	<p><u>Regional councils</u> in each of 12 Agency of Human Services Districts with members based both on state guidelines and locally decided</p>

	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
Local Role	Charged with creating an early childhood system by focusing on local needs, working parents' needs, child care quality, and consolidating funding; Councils make their own decisions about where to focus coordination and some resources based on local needs (state has to approve, however)	Charged with community planning, awarding funds for local services, educating about the importance of early childhood services, collaborating with private and public organizations, building community commitment to early childhood, and reporting outcomes to the State	Charged with developing system-building approaches based on each community's unique strengths; Follow a common coalition-building process, but make their own decisions about where to focus	Charged with creating a system of services that builds on existing services and fills in gaps as needed; Share a common mission but make their own decisions about where to focus; Each has its own leadership and locally-developed plan (state has to approve, however)	Charged with policy and system development, public engagement, community mobilization, and resource development; Share a common mission with the state-level Partnership; Use a local planning process to increase coordination and collaboration to address unique local needs	Charged with creating and integrating the early childhood system at the local level; Responsibilities mirror the state council's; State council establishes guidelines, but regional councils will make their own decisions about where to focus
Local Staffing	<u>Full-time</u> or <u>part-time</u> pilot coordinators	<u>Full-time</u> or <u>part-time</u> community empowerment coordinators	<u>Part-time</u> community coordinators who receive a small yearly stipend (~\$5,000) for multiple years	<u>Full-time</u> partnership executive directors	<u>Full-time</u> or <u>part-time</u> local partnership directors	<u>Full-time</u> regional council executive directors

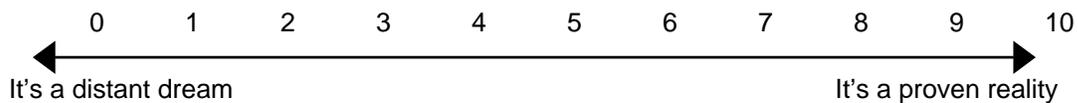
	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
Incorporation of Local Input in State-Level System Building	<p>State-level staff gather pilot successes, ideas, and needs to inform the state-level system.</p> <p>The waiver process (see below under unique characteristics or strengths) highlights local barriers to be addressed statewide.</p> <p>Pilots have representation on the Early Childhood School Readiness Commission, and collaborate with the Commission on early childhood systems building work branded as Smart Start Colorado.</p>	<p>The Iowa Community Empowerment Board gets ideas and insights from Community Empowerment coordinators through the State Empowerment Office and from local coordinators themselves on occasion.</p>	<p>Because the Initiative is foundation-sponsored and not tied to a state-level entity, advocacy is the main route for ensuring local input is incorporated into state-level system building.</p> <p>Through the Build Initiative and Ready 4 K, MIF representatives are involved in boards and committees focused on moving Minnesota's early care and education policy agenda and systems reform.</p>	<p>Local partnerships regularly communicate with NCPC and provide feedback on what works and what does not. NCPC communicates local input to its Board and to policymakers.</p> <p>NCPC's local partnership advisory committee includes eight local partnership board chairs and seven executive directors, and is a liaison and policymaking voice between local partnerships and NCPC. Also, two LPAC members sit on the NCPC Board.</p>	<p>OSPR receives local input in several ways including local coordinator participation on ad hoc committees, surveys, and attendance at partnership meetings.</p> <p>Fully incorporating the local point of view into the state-level systems planning is still a work in progress.</p>	<p>The state council's regional councils committee will be a vehicle for incorporating local input into state-level systems building.</p>
Local Communication Mechanisms	<p>Monthly pilot coordinator meetings</p> <p>Quarterly 2-day Pilot coordinator and state staff meetings</p>	<p>Quarterly coordinator meetings</p> <p>Some regional coordinator meetings</p>	<p>Local coalition meetings</p> <p>Regional coordinator meetings</p> <p>Quarterly statewide coordinator meetings</p> <p>Shared compilation of promising strategies</p>	<p>Executive director forums</p> <p>Conferences</p> <p>Smart.net website</p> <p>Video-conferencing</p> <p>Mentor partnerships</p>	<p>Quarterly partnership coordinator meetings</p> <p>Bi-monthly conference calls</p> <p>Peer-to-peer networking</p> <p>Community newsletters</p>	<p>[Specific communication mechanisms within and across regions will develop.]</p>

	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
Technical Assistance (TA)	State-provided for pilot site development; less TA available now. TA needs have emerged in areas of financing, professional development, public engagement and data collection and evaluation.	A state team of representatives from involved state agencies and the Office of Empowerment provide TA and a detailed Iowa Empowerment toolkit. Topics include community planning, board development, accountability, and other areas as requested.	MIFs work with coalitions to gather partners and community input, establish a vision, and develop an action plan for system building. MIFs then help fund, monitor, and provide ongoing technical assistance to coalitions as they implement their action plans.	NCPC field staff and program specialists provide TA to local partnerships. Topics include accounting, program monitoring, evaluation, board and organizational development, strategic planning, collaboration, fundraising, and community outreach and engagement.	Sites receive individual TA during monthly meetings and peer-to-peer. Topics include coalition building, public engagement, planning, evaluation, grantwriting, advocacy, collaboration. Community newsletters publish ideas on best practices, collaboration, mobilization, early childhood, funding, and research.	The State Council is responsible for ensuring regional councils have the TA they need.
Advocacy	Pilot sites educate legislators about the importance of an early childhood focus. The Colorado Children's Campaign , a statewide child advocacy organization, includes Pilots in formulating policy and shaping messages.	Coordinators advocate locally and together through the Association for Iowa's Children .	MIFs and coalitions participate in advocacy coordinated by Ready 4 K , a statewide child advocacy organization.	The State partnership coordinates a statewide message that is implemented locally through partnership advocacy networks. Local advocates talk to legislators to inform them about essential services and why funding must continue.	Partnerships perform informal local advocacy with local representatives; State level staff and OPSR inform legislators about early childhood systems work.	Regional councils will inform high-level state administrators through state council committees. Regional councils may participate in statewide advocacy—e.g., Kids are Priority One and Vermont Children's Forum .
Unique Characteristics or Strengths	Pilots can request waivers from state laws, rules, and regulations that may create barriers to implementing their work and to offering effective services—most have made funding more flexible	Statewide effort, which includes a comprehensive focus with local flexibility.	Comprehensive coalition building process Successful use of voluntary support networks Compilation of promising strategies shared among local coalitions	Longest-running statewide effort with deep learning Extensive technical assistance support system Working data and reporting system	Strong record of diffusing innovation by promoting successful programming at one site to other sites. Includes a Foundation made up of private citizens for the purpose of private sector fundraising.	Success in engaging high-level state administrators Use of executive orders to put system-building efforts in motion

	Colorado	Iowa	Minnesota	North Carolina	Oklahoma	Vermont
Monitoring and Evaluation	<p>Pilots report on the number of families served and <u>progress in 8 comprehensive goal areas</u> with narratives included in annual continuation reports to the state</p> <p>An ECSST taskforce is now doing a crosswalk of existing in-state standards to identify <u>standards</u> that cover all four domains addressed by the Pilots—health, mental health, early childhood education, and family support</p>	<p><u>Performance measures</u> are collected across local empowerment areas, including number of families/children served, number of face-to-face visits, rates of child abuse, and Early ACCESS referrals while participating in the various programs.</p> <p><u>Statewide standards</u> also exist in the areas of healthy children; safe and nurturing families; safe and supportive communities; school readiness; and safe and nurturing childcare environments</p>	<p>The Wilder Research Center helped to develop an Initiative evaluation plan. As part of the evaluation plan:</p> <p>A <u>community survey</u> kicks off the community coalition planning process.</p> <p>A <u>key actor follow-up survey</u> assesses immediate and intermediate outcomes in communities.</p>	<p>All partnerships have local evaluation plans, and the <u>Performance-Based Incentive System</u> (PBIS) measures local partnership progress annually on key measures related to early care and education, family support, health, and administration.</p> <p>From 1993-2002, the Frank Porter Graham Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill evaluated NC Smart Start.</p>	<p>Each local site evaluates their efforts and reports to the state through a variety of means including surveys and focus groups while also reporting outcomes in <u>the 4 Smart Start outcome areas</u>.</p> <p>Separate surveys measuring <u>collaboration and TA effectiveness</u> are utilized in all 16 sites in addition to a <u>monitoring assessment tool</u> which is used by the state team during annual site visits and as a local self assessment tool.</p> <p>The University of Oklahoma has also conducted a comprehensive evaluation of each community's coalition structure and community impact.</p>	<p>[Specific evaluation plans have yet to develop.]</p> <p>The State Council will have a working committee on data and evaluation that deals with issues regarding evaluation, data collection, reporting, use of best practices, and needs assessment at the state and local levels</p>

1. A focus on early childhood system building, not just funding programs.

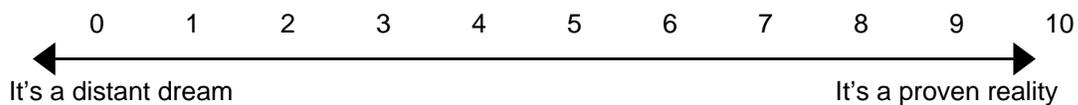
Efforts should tackle system issues and not just receive “seed funding” to develop demonstration projects and programs. While systems ultimately are made up of programs, and communities engaged in system efforts can fill gaps with new or improved programs, efforts should not lose sight of essential systems issues such as how those programs are coordinated, integrated, or aligned. This applies at both a state and local level. For example, even if the state successfully consolidates funding or better integrates services, there are likely an array of programs and services at the local level with overlapping responsibilities that deal with some of the same families. Communities need to consider how programs can work efficiently and effectively together, and this often involves making decisions about primary responsibility and referral and follow-up on a family-by-family basis. On a practice level, and even on a local system level, this work cannot be done through state policy or regulation but requires a community problem-solving component and nexus.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

2. Clear state/local roles and responsibilities that go beyond parallel play.

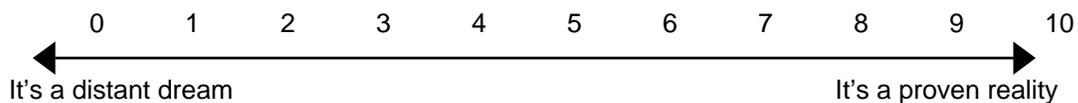
State and local entities focused on system building efforts should have clear and distinct responsibilities that ensure they are more than parallel efforts that do not intersect and support one another. Responsibilities for decision making about oversight, planning, funding, spending, technical assistance, communication, collaboration, and reporting should be understood and coordinated, and not duplicative.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

3. Flexibility that allows communities to address their own priorities.

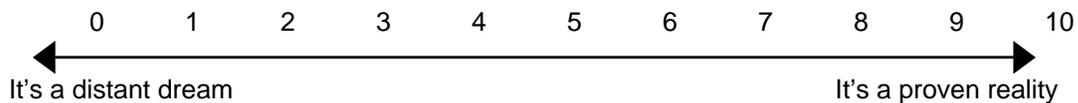
Communities are diverse and have different needs and strengths. As a result, they typically are in the best position to determine their own priorities. System-building efforts should avoid concentrating all decision making authority at either the state or local levels; instead, they should emphasize local flexibility. Frequently, local decision-making is needed to contour services to unique local strengths and resources. Decisions regarding how to organize services and who to award specific contracts and grant funds to can be highly political, but people at the local level generally are in the best position to know which organizations and services will most effectively respond to community needs.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

4. Mechanisms for local input into state-level system decisions.

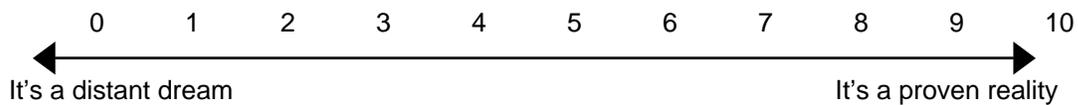
The state regularly sets policies and parameters around funding that gets administered at the local level. Some policies work well and others have unintended consequences. Communities see those consequences firsthand and are in the best position to provide feedback to the state, particularly regarding the interplay of requirements across different agencies and funding streams. Regular and intentional two-way communication through meetings, forums, or workshops involving both state and community representatives is essential to ensuring that communities are able to help identify areas where state rules and procedures can be modified to better achieve results.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

5. Representative and meaningful cross-sector engagement.

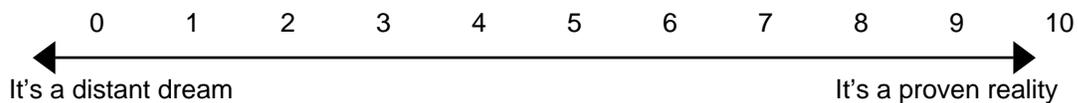
At both the state and local levels, system building should be a cross-sector and collaborative endeavor that engages stakeholders from multiple parts of the early childhood system. While each system-building effort can define for itself the kinds of individuals that should be at the table, representation should be diverse and from all relevant sectors of the early childhood system. In addition, efforts should engage voluntary support networks where possible, and provide meaningful roles for parents.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

6. Sufficient investments in local-level leadership.

Leadership for system-building at the local level should not be a volunteer effort. Infrastructure is needed to make collaboration and system-building efforts successful and sustainable. This includes funding for community-level staffing, along with technical assistance and training. In addition, local leaders should have local system knowledge and credibility combined with the energy, inclination, and ability to work with others.

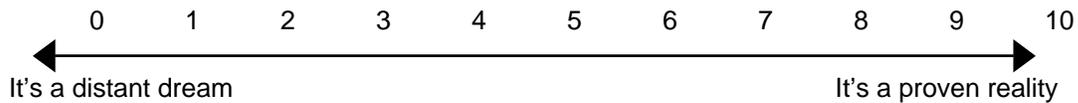


Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

7. Opportunities for connecting local efforts to statewide advocacy.

The most effective advocacy happens at the local level. Local entities and individuals are most aware of early childhood system needs and can be the most compelling spokespersons for system issues such as infrastructure, services, and quality. As a result, they should be part of the statewide advocacy base on early childhood issues (either organized locally or by other organizations such as statewide child advocates) that educates

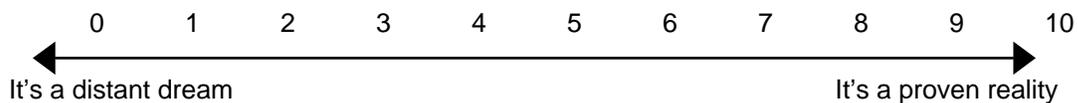
policymakers or parents and other segments of the general public. Advocacy training should be available locally, along with opportunities to engage and educate diverse and powerful constituencies at the grassroots, grasstops, and state levels.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

8. Mechanisms for learning and innovation across communities.

Communities can explore and test new programs and ideas more quickly and cost-effectively than the state, taking advantage of energy that exists at the local level. Where there is energy and expertise, communities can develop new or reformed services that then serve as models for their peers. Mechanisms for learning such as peer-to-peer technical assistance or mentoring should be in place to ensure effective community practices or strategies get shared. Those mechanisms should support the transition from site-specific innovation to scale-up or institutionalization.

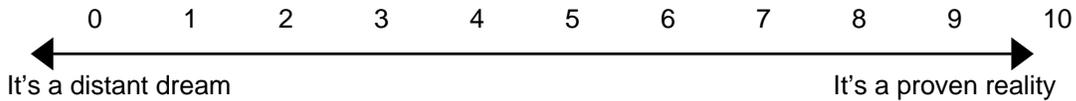


Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

9. Leveraging of local and private resources to support the early learning agenda.

Outside some limited foundation support for particular initiatives, state governments rarely receive gifts or grants from the private sector (individual, corporate, or foundation givers). Most of this giving is local and personal, often related to very tangible and physical things (e.g. buildings and capital campaigns). Communities should pursue opportunities to generate and leverage local funding and resources to support early childhood system-building efforts. At the same time, if a state-level nonprofit is leading the initiative, that entity might also consider a fundraising strategy that allows for larger contributions from

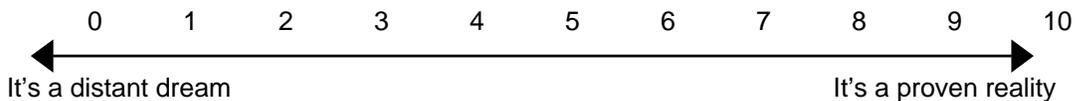
corporations and other philanthropic sources that could then be disseminated locally as smaller grants.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

10. Mechanisms for cross-community reporting and accountability.

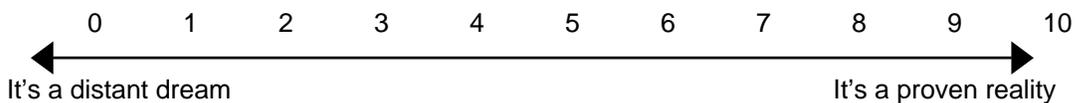
While communities can pursue their own system-building plans and priorities, they should work toward and measure common performance goals or outcomes that are set at the state level and can be measured on a statewide basis. The ability to aggregate data on local communities and track progress statewide is critical to ensuring adequate resources are in place and can be sustained.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

11. Attention to diversity and cultural congruence.

Communities within a state generally vary greatly in terms of race, culture, and language. Developing culturally-competent and congruent early childhood systems that respond to each community's cultural mix is essential for success. Attention to this issue should exist at both the state and local levels. At the same time, while state actions need to be culturally congruent, there is no "one size fits all" solution and local efforts need to pay particular attention to these issues, as effective early learning systems should be tailored to the children and families they serve.



Comments: (e.g. reasons for your rating, gaps, barriers, opportunities)

12. Considering the ratings you just gave, in what three areas would you most like to receive technical assistance to help your state move forward?

Check your top three priorities. Feel free to make notes in the margins or on the back if you want to be more specific about your technical assistance needs.

- Focusing on early childhood system building, not just funding programs.
- Developing clear state/local roles and responsibilities that go beyond parallel play.
- Achieving flexibility that allows communities to address their own priorities.
- Developing mechanisms for local input into state-level system decisions.
- Building representative and meaningful cross-sector engagement.
- Making sufficient investments in local-level leadership.
- Establishing opportunities to connect local efforts to statewide advocacy.
- Developing mechanisms for learning and innovation across communities.
- Leveraging local and private resources to support the early learning agenda.
- Developing mechanisms for cross-community reporting and accountability.
- Addressing diversity and cultural congruence.
- Other _____

Survey Monkey Questionnaire

The following set of questions was designed to get initial thoughts from Building Connections participants on how community planning and governance structures can contribute to early childhood systems building. Results reported below were obtained through the Survey Monkey and shared at the beginning of the June 27-29, 2006 Building Connections convening held in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Biggest Problems

What are the biggest problems that young children in your state face in getting to school and equipped for success? (Please check the circle to indicate where you fall on the continuum of how important or unimportant each of the following is in your state or most of its communities and whether it must be addressed to achieve school readiness goals.

	Not an important problem in this state or most of its communities	A somewhat important problem that eventually should be addressed, but not a major need	Not a high action priority but an important problem that should be addressed to help achieve the goal	A very important problem that should be addressed to help achieve the goal	A top problem that absolutely must be addressed to achieve the goal
Too many parents are stressed or struggling and do not provide good nurturing/learning environments	0% (0)	3% (1)	28% (11)	56% (22)	13% (5)
Child care is not sufficiently available or of adequate quality	0% (0)	10% (4)	17% (7)	27% (11)	46% (19)
There is a lack of quality pre-school programs	5% (2)	5% (2)	12% (5)	44% (18)	34% (14)
Some children do not receive needed health services, including dental, vision, and mental health	0% (0)	2% (1)	10% (4)	49% (20)	39% (16)
Children with special needs (including developmental delays) are identified too late and provided insufficient services to address those special needs	0% (0)	17% (7)	24% (10)	44% (18)	15% (6)
Current services and supports do not address the gaps that exist in society along racial and ethnic lines	0% (0)	7% (3)	22% (9)	34% (14)	37% (15)
Some children live in neighborhoods that make them particularly vulnerable, due to lack of safety, decent housing, and general child-friendly environments	0% (0)	7% (3)	22% (9)	46% (19)	24% (10)
There is general lack of community attention to and support for young children's development	5% (2)	7% (3)	20% (8)	32% (13)	37% (15)
There is a general lack of child-and-family friendly spaces and places for developmental activities	7% (3)	22% (9)	34% (14)	27% (11)	10% (4)

Goals for Community Planning and Governance

What do you want to achieve as a result of developing community planning and governance structures?

	Not a reason for supporting community planning	A minor reason for supporting community planning	A somewhat important reason for supporting community planning	An important reasons for supporting community planning	A top reason for supporting community planning
Establish unified voice and stronger political support and mobilization for state action	0% (0)	0% (0)	5% (2)	24% (10)	71% (30)
Improve the quality, affordability, and availability of child care	0% (0)	2% (1)	10% (4)	32% (13)	55% (22)
Increase young child health coverage and use of comprehensive and preventive health services	2% (1)	0% (0)	12% (5)	39% (16)	46% (19)
Improve services and supports that strengthen parenting (parenting education, home visiting, family support, etc.)	0% (0)	2% (1)	10% (4)	45% (19)	43% (18)
Enlist private partners to leverage additional local funding and support for early childhood services	0% (0)	0% (0)	8% (3)	28% (11)	65% (26)
Establish broader and deeper community commitment to early learning and unleash new volunteer activities	0% (0)	0% (0)	21% (9)	45% (19)	33% (14)
Reduce duplication and fragmentation of services and make accessing services easier for families of young children	0% (0)	2% (1)	15% (6)	25% (10)	58% (23)
Increase the involvement of schools in reaching out to parents of young children Test new services and projects that can improve results for expansion in community and or adoption by state	0% (0)	2% (1)	12% (5)	46% (19)	39% (16)
Test new services and projects that can improve results for expansion in community and or adoption by state	2% (1)	7% (3)	19% (8)	45% (19)	26% (11)
Create a learning community across communities that better transfers and builds upon successful efforts	0% (0)	2% (1)	7% (3)	29% (12)	62% (26)
Identify ways for the state to better administer early childhood services	0% (0)	2% (1)	10% (4)	36% (15)	52% (22)

Roles and Responsibilities of the State and Communities

Of the following, who do you think should have responsibility for the following early childhood system-building tasks?

	State only	Primarily state, with some community input	Equal state and community	Primarily community, with some state oversight	Community only
Developing early learning standards and kindergarten entry assessment goals	7% (3)	51% (21)	39% (16)	2% (1)	0% (0)
Leveraging private sector funding support	0% (0)	7% (3)	63% (26)	27% (11)	2% (1)
Enlisting parents and community organization involvement	0% (0)	5% (2)	32% (13)	44% (18)	20% (8)
Addressing racial disparity issues	0% (0)	12% (5)	83% (34)	5% (2)	0% (0)
Coordinating early childhood programs and services	0% (0)	2% (1)	66% (27)	29% (12)	2% (1)
Establishing and enforcing minimum program/service standards	13% (5)	53% (20)	32% (12)	3% (1)	0% (0)
Decision making about child care subsidy funding	5% (2)	55% (22)	35% (14)	2% (1)	2% (1)
Setting standards for and administering child care subsidies	8% (3)	65% (26)	22% (9)	5% (2)	0% (0)
Decision making about Medicaid, SCHIP, and health services funding	8% (3)	60% (24)	28% (11)	5% (2)	0% (0)
Decision making about standards and administration of Medicaid, SCHIP, and health services	12% (5)	63% (26)	20% (8)	5% (2)	0% (0)
Decision making about pre-school funding	0% (0)	45% (18)	48% (19)	8% (3)	0% (0)
Decision making about standards and administration of pre-school programs	8% (3)	42% (17)	40% (16)	10% (4)	0% (0)
Decision making about parenting education, home visiting, and family support funding	0% (0)	23% (9)	46% (18)	26% (10)	5% (2)
Decision making about standards and administration of parenting education, home visiting and family support programs	2% (1)	20% (8)	65% (26)	12% (5)	0% (0)

If you had to select just one, what do you think the state needs to do in working with communities to build stronger early learning systems?

Lead	9.8% (4)
Follow	0% (0)
Collaborate/partner	82.9% (34)
Get Out of the Way	0% (0)
Other (Please specify)	7.3% (3)

Do you have a “master vision” regarding what a comprehensive early childhood system needs to look like in your state that defines roles, responsibilities, funding, and accountability requirements at the state and community levels?

Yes	24.4% (10)
No	2.4% (1)
Sort Of	73.2% (30)

What best characterizes your role?

State-level leader	45.2% (19)
Community-level leader	35.7% (15)
Consultant/technical assistance provider	7.1% (3)
Foundation funder	4.8% (2)
Evaluator	2.4% (1)
Other	4.8% (2)

State Affiliation

Arizona	7.1% (3)
Colorado	9.5% (4)
Illinois	7.1% (3)
Iowa	2.4% (1)
Michigan	7.1% (3)
Minnesota	11.9% (5)
New Jersey	7.1% (3)
Ohio	7.1% (3)
Oklahoma	9.5% (4)
Pennsylvania	7.1% (3)
Vermont	0% (0)
Virginia	7.1% (3)
Washington	7.1% (3)
Other	9.5% (4)

What is your name and organizational affiliation? (Optional)

THE BUILD INITIATIVE

The Build Initiative is a nine-state multi-year initiative, supported by a number of foundation funders through the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative. Build supports teams of key state stakeholders in planning and mobilization activities directed to building comprehensive early learning systems in their states. Teams include both public and private members. The focus of Build is upon the first five years of life, with a broad conception of systems building that includes health, family support, early intervention, and early care and education. States are given the flexibility to meet their goals in diverse ways, based on each state's unique circumstances. Funds are not used to implement direct services but rather to connect programs and infrastructure into a coordinated system of policies and services.

The Build Initiative is constructed as a learning partnership across the nine states, contouring its technical assistance and peer learning activities to the evolving issues and opportunities identified by the states. The Build Initiative began with four states—Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio—in May 2002. In 2003, Build added a fifth state—Pennsylvania, with four learning partner states—Hawaii, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Washington.

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SECPTAN

About SECPTAN

The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) provides current information about early childhood policy initiatives to state policy makers. It assists them in assessing the best available evidence and information about effective policies and practices in early childhood. The network is managed by the Child & Family Policy Center, with funding from the Ford Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. For more information about SECPTAN, visit www.finebynine.org or contact Charles Bruner, Network Director, or Vivian Day at 515-280-9027.

About this Series

This monograph is part of SECTPAN's series on early childhood issues, which also includes:

- Beyond the Usual Suspects: Developing New Allies to Invest in School Readiness
- Building an Early Learning System: The ABCs of Planning and Governance Structures
- Child Welfare and School Readiness – Making the Link for Vulnerable Children
- Health Care and School Readiness: The Health Community's Role in Supporting Child Development – New Approaches and Model Legislation
- Financing School Readiness Strategies: An Annotated Bibliography
- Many Happy Returns: Three Economic Models that Make the Case for School Readiness
- Measuring Children's School Readiness: Options for Developing State Baselines and Benchmarks
- On the Path to School Readiness: Key Questions to Consider Before Establishing Universal Pre-Kindergarten
- Seven Things Policy Makers Need to Know about School Readiness
- Up and Running: A Compendium of Multi-State Early Childhood Initiatives

About the Child & Family Policy Center

The Child & Family Policy Center (CFPC) was established in 1989 by former Iowa legislator Charles Bruner, Ph.D. to better link research and policy on issues vital to children and families, and to advocate for outcome-based policies to improve child well-being. CFPC is active both statewide and nationally. In Iowa, the Child & Family Policy Center assists the state and communities in developing integrated, community-based, family-focused, and results-accountable services, particularly for vulnerable children. CFPC also produces a variety of reports, case studies, concept papers, and technical assistance tools on systems reform and community building that are widely used across the United States.



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