THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MISSOURI'S CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

A Strategic Vision & Roadmap to 2026

STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

A strong childhood system is essential to supporting working families, ensuring children have safe environments and healthy development, and advancing a prosperous economy. Recruiting, retaining, and supporting an effective childhood workforce is critical for realizing Missouri's vision for early childhood. In fact, it will be impossible for Missouri to achieve its goals of expanding access to and improving the quality of early care, education, and services without a strong, well-supported, and well-compensated early childhood workforce. To achieve this vision, Missouri will focus on four big goals that support the ultimate goal for all children to be ready for school.

This strategic plan outlines the Office of Childhood's (OOC) plan for the next three years as it seeks to achieve Missouri's vision for early childhood. It is organized around OOC's four Big Goals, embedded within each goal are objectives and strategies. Objectives represent OOC's major focus areas within each Big Goal, and the strategies included within each objective articulate OOC's approach to achieving these aims. To ensure that progress toward these goals is measurable, this plan also includes 2023 action items which OOC plans to accomplish in the next year and quantitative targets.

Additional context is included in each section to provide background and an overview of the current state, as measured by available data in fall 2022. While OOC's goals are ambitious and will lead to positive impacts on children and families across the state, fully realizing the state's vision for early childhood will require time, and likely additional investments in early childhood at all levels of the system (i.e., local, state, federal).

IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG, UNIFIED CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

A STRONG CHILDHOOD SYSTEM IS ESSENTIAL TO SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES, ENSURING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS AND HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT, AND ADVANCING A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY.

Promoting School Readiness and Child Well-Being:

The window from birth to age five is critical in a child's development, with 90 percent of brain development occurring during this time.[1] High-quality early childhood services not only lead to gains in early reading and math, but longitudinal studies also illustrate reduced grade retention, reduced placement in special education, increased likelihood of attending a four-year university, and better earnings.[2] Benefits of early childhood services extend beyond education, with participating children experiencing reduced chances of criminal activity, depression, teenage pregnancy, and welfare participation.[3] Afterschool programming also enhances these gains later in childhood and results in additional positive outcomes such as decreased behavior referrals and increased school attendance.[4]

Strengthening the Economy:

Additionally, increased access to accessible and high-quality early and extended learning experiences for children empowers caregivers, who are mostly women, to remain in or re-enter the workforce, advance skills, and earn income, which boosts the economy as a whole.[5] Research shows 61 percent of working parents in Missouri reported missing work due to child care challenges, and when women have access to child care, they earn more than $94,000 of additional income over the course of their careers.[6,7] These benefits also extend to society as a whole with research demonstrating that each dollar spent on high-quality birth to five programs can have a 13 percent return on investment, and thus reduce later government spending.

Note: This strategic plan focuses on early childhood initiatives in the Office of Childhood; however, OOC administers both early and extended learning programs. OOC is committed to providing and improving afterschool programming for children in Missouri as investments in afterschool programming build on the initial investments made in early childhood. Participating in afterschool programs results in positive outcomes such as decreased behavior referrals and increased school attendance. More information about afterschool programming can be found on EarlyConnections.mo.gov.

1 https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd/
2 https://www.policymattersohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/pre-kpinch_Nov2008_report.pdf
3 https://evidencebasedprograms.org/programs/abecedarian-project/
4 https://earlyconnections.mo.gov/media/pdf/afterschool-programs
5 https://www.ffyf.org/why-it-matters/support-working-families/
6 https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/A-Lifetimes-Worth-of-Benefits-Compliant.pdf
7 https://mochamber.com/news-archive/new-research-shows-missouri-loses-1-35-billion-in-annual-economic-opportunity-due-to-childcare-gaps/
8 https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf

MISSOURI'S PROGRESS TO DATE

MISSOURI HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BETTER SERVE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THROUGH HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES BY BUILDING ON THE INCREMENTAL SUCCESSES OF THE SYSTEM OVER THE YEARS. MISSOURI HAS OFFERED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS FOR DECADES, AND RECENT MAJOR SUCCESSES LED TO THE STATE RECENTLY UNIFYING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS UNDER ONE OFFICE:

2014: Pre-K funding added to K-12 education funding formula

2015: A statewide early childhood advocacy campaign raised $13 million in a Raise Your Hands for Kids ballot initiative

2016: Quality Assurance Report (QAR) pilot established

2018: $42 million for Pre-K funding added to K-12 education funding formula; QAR pilot sunset extended

2019: Missouri received initial $6.5M Preschool Development Grant (PDG) B-5 and became one of only 23 states to be awarded PDG B-5 renewal for an additional $33M for three years; Legislation approved $6M in new funding for home visiting programs; Missouri became one of six states awarded the National Governors Association Prenatal to 3 grant

2020: Missouri became one of 10 states selected as Zero to Three grantee; DESE restructured early childhood programs into Office of Early Learning; Missouri appropriated over $66 million in CARES Act COVID-19 relief funds for child care providers

2021: Governor Parson established OOC through executive order, resulting in the consolidation of early childhood governance for Missouri; Multiple childhood programs transitioned into OOC; The Hunt Institute conducted activities to improve stakeholder engagement; Missouri appropriated over $185 million in CRRSA COVID-19 relief funds for child care

2022: Governor Parson established new Early Childhood State Advisory Council through executive order, resulting in the consolidation of advisory structures; Missouri appropriated nearly $722 million in ARPA COVID relief funds and
$15 million for rate increases to the First Steps early intervention and Parents as Teachers Parent Education program

MISSOURI'S CHILDHOOD VISION: ALL CHILDREN ARE SAFE, HEALTHY, AND SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

- All children, and especially children from vulnerable communities, have access to affordable and high-quality early care and education that prepares them for success in school and in life.
- Working families have the resources and supports to easily navigate Missouri's childhood system and choose a high-quality care and education option that supports their child's development.
- Families with children receiving support at home understand how to support their child's development through family engagement strategies and readily available resources.
- Childhood professionals are focused on providing a high-quality experience for children, regardless of the setting, and have access to the tools (e.g., curriculum, assessment and screening tools, etc.) and necessary training/professional development to support child learning and development.
- State systems and processes are modernized to focus on the experience of families/providers and yield data to drive policy and decision-making.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSOURI'S EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

MISSOURI, LIKE MANY OTHER STATES, FACES CRITICAL CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING THE VISION THAT ALL MISSOURI CHILDREN ARE SAFE, HEALTHY, AND SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS.

Access: Too few families have access to early childhood programs and services, as a result of both insufficient early childhood options and insufficient funding, which results in consequences to children's health, safety, and well-being, as well as preventing many Missouri caregivers from participating in the workforce.

Quality: Currently, Missouri does not have a clear definition of quality for early childhood programs and services. Additionally, there are not enough supports for professionals to improve their quality or for families to make informed decisions for their children.

Local coordination: Across the state, local leaders are not supported to coordinate information and resources for early childhood professionals and families in the communities where they live and work.

Data-driven solutions: There is a lack of real-time and overall data to empower decision makers to find innovative solutions to increase access and scale high-quality services.

MISSOURI'S BIG GOALS

TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION AND ADDRESS THE SYSTEM'S GREATEST CHALLENGES, OOC WILL FOCUS ON THESE FOUR BIG GOALS IN SERVICE OF MISSOURI'S ULTIMATE GOAL FOR ALL CHILDREN IN THE STATE TO HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES PRIOR TO KINDERGARTEN THAT WILL PREPARE THEM FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE:
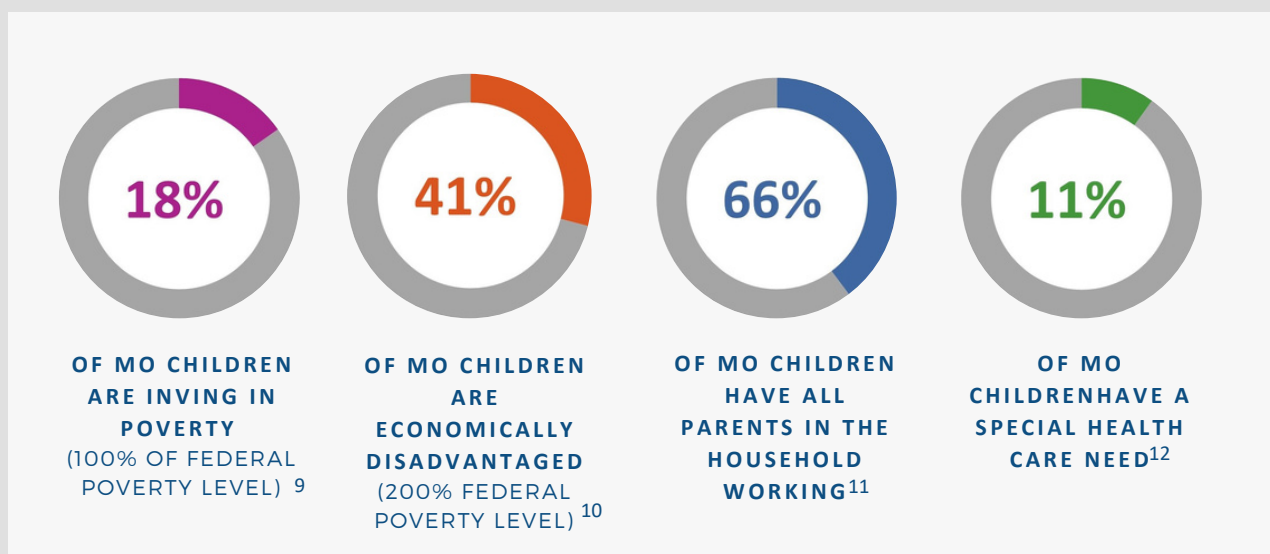
BIG GOALS	
EXPAND ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	Missouri will expand access to high-quality early childhood options for families by identifying current gaps and maximizing existing and new resources.
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	Missouri will define a vision of quality for the state and provide aligned supports and incentives for professionals in order to drive continuous improvement in the quality of early childhood programs and services.
STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP	Missouri will identify, support, and empower local leaders in every part of the state to develop and implement strong community plans aimed at ensuring all families with young children can access high-quality programs, services, and resources in their communities.
MODERNIZE SYSTEMS AND IMPROVE OPERATIONS	Missouri will identify and implement critical shifts in OOC operations to improve the experience of families and early childhood professionals and to yield important data to inform policy and decision-making.

MISSOURI LANDSCAPE

MISSOURI'S LANDSCAPE CONSISTS OF APPROXIMATELY 450,000 CHILDREN BIRTH THROUGH AGE FIVE, ACCORDING TO 2019 CENSUS DATA. [9,10,11,12,13]

	Infants	One-year-olds	Two-year-olds	Three-year-olds	Four-year-olds	Five-year-olds
Estimated children	71,649	72,748	73,546	74,251	75,384	79,065

18%

OF MO CHILDREN ARE INVING IN POVERTY
(100% OF FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL) 9

41%

OF MO CHILDREN ARE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
(200% FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL) 10

66%

OF MO CHILDREN HAVE ALL PARENTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD WORKING[11]

11%

OF MO CHILDRENHAVE A SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEED[12]

As evidenced by the data, the need for early childhood services in Missouri is vast. Meeting the needs of these children and families in the state necessitates innovative approaches and partnerships that extend beyond OOC. Many organizations, both public and private, around the state already engage in and support early childhood efforts, and OOC seeks to partner with these organizations to meet the need for early childhood services (i.e., Head Start, school districts, etc.). To achieve the goals set forth in this plan, OOC will use all available resources (i.e., federal, state, and philanthropic) to drive towards a unified vision for children birth to five in Miss all available resources (i.e., federal, state, and philanthropic) to drive towards a unified vision for children birth to five in Missouri.ouri.

9 Missouri Census Data Center Population Estimates https://mcdc.missouri.edu/applications/population/by-age/

10 2019 Census Data-Poverty https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty&g=0400000US29&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B17024

11 2019 Census Data- 200% FPL: https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty&g=0400000US29&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B17024

12 2019 Census data- Parents Working:https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B23008

13 National resource 2019-20 Center from Child and Adolescent Health (Children with Special healthcare need) https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=8577&r=1&r2=27&g=936

BIG GOAL 1: EXPAND ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

MISSOURI WILL EXPAND ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES BY IDENTIFYING CURRENT GAPS AND MAXIMIZING EXISTING AND NEW RESOURCES.

Background

For the purposes of this plan, access is defined as the number of children or families participating in a publicly-funded early childhood program or service. Before discussing how to expand access, it is helpful to understand existing gaps in access and the systemic causes that perpetuate these gaps.

While OOC is working to build a system in which all children in the state are able to access high-quality early childhood options, research shows that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have these options and more likely to enter kindergarten behind their more affluent peers.[14] To achieve its vision that all children are healthy, safe, and successful learners who are prepared for school, OOC particularly seeks to expand access to high-quality early childhood programs and services to children from economically disadvantaged households, who are at higher risk of entering kindergarten behind.

14 https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319_school_disadvantage_isaacs.pdf

Current State

Of the 450,000 children birth to five in Missouri, roughly 185,000[15] (41 percent) are living in households at or below 200 percent of Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (i.e., considered economically disadvantaged), and would benefit from publicly-funded early childhood services to minimize the risk of them falling behind their more affluent peers prior to kindergarten entry.

To meet the needs of this population, OOC offers a range of early care and education services targeted at serving economically disadvantaged families. It is important to note OOC partners also offer programs aimed at serving economically disadvantaged families (e.g., Early Head Start, Head Start).

34%
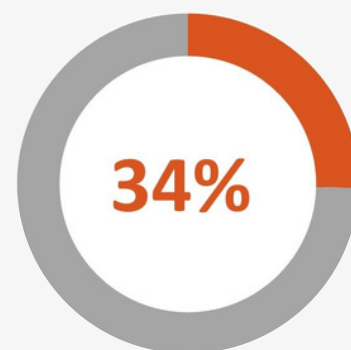
OF MO ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN BIRTH TO FIVE ARE CURRENTLY SERVED

Currently, only one in three economically disadvantaged children birth to age five access Missouri's publicly-funded early care and education programs that target low-income families through OOC and its partners; this percentage is even lower for infants and toddlers. [16]

Even when families are eligible, there are a variety of reasons they may not be accessing these programs. Many families face economic, geographic, or systemic barriers to access, including lack of awareness, insufficient funding, transportation challenges, language barriers, complex technology systems, lack of options in the community, and nontraditional hours not being offered by providers. In some cases, because all of OOC's programs and services are voluntary, families who are eligible for a service may simply choose not to use it.

Closing Missouri's gaps in access will require strategic coordination and partnership across all of the publicly-funded early childhood programs in the state both within and outside of OOC. For that reason, OOC is focused on building and expanding access to a strong, unified and coordinated mixed delivery system, in which publicly-funded services are offered in both public (i.e., local education agencies [LEAs]) and private (i.e., child care centers, family child care homes, and church-based child care programs that accept public funds to serve children) settings. A mixed delivery approach to early childhood is necessary to meet the diverse needs of families and providers across all areas of the state. This includes expanding access to preschool and child care, as well as important childhood services, including parent education, home visiting, early intervention, early childhood special education services, and afterschool programming.

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15 https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty&g=0400000US29&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B17024
16 FY 21 program data from early care and education (ECE) programs indicated that 62,895 children were served across ECE programs. Some children may be served in multiple programs, thus this count may contain some duplicates.

OBJECTIVE 1:

IDENTIFY GAPS IN ACCESS. ANALYZE CURRENT DATA AND COLLECT ADDITIONAL DATA AS NEEDED, RELATED TO CURRENT NEED, DEMAND, CAPACITY, AND UTILIZATION OF SERVICES, PARTICULARLY AS IT RELATES TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND COMMUNITIES.

Strategies:

A. Develop a way to measure access for each program and across programs, and determine additional data to collect, as needed.

B. Publish access data periodically that depict statewide and program-specific gaps in access.

C. Develop a process for using an unduplicated child count that provides more accurate and timely data on gaps in access, disaggregated by key child demographics (e.g., race, age, geography).

OBJECTIVE 2:

INCREASE AWARENESS AND COORDINATION TO ENSURE ALL AVAILABLE SPOTS OR SERVICES ARE UTILIZED. ENSURE THAT ALL FAMILIES IN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, ARE SUPPORTED TO LEARN ABOUT, APPLY FOR, AND ENROLL IN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THEY ARE ELIGIBLE FOR OR THEY NEED.

Strategies:

A. Make available statewide resources for families to easily access information about programs, particularly in places where children and families already connect (e.g., libraries, physician offices, laundromats, community centers).

B. Conduct statewide and targeted childhood information campaigns, with a particular focus on underused programs and services.

C. Support communities to use a locally coordinated process for enrollment, intake, and referrals that will better support all families, regardless of background or location, to access programs and services and ensure all available spots and services in a community are used.

OBJECTIVE 3:
INCREASE CAPACITY AND AVAILABILITY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES. MAXIMIZE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SERVED IN ALL SETTINGS AND CREATE NEW CAPACITY AS IDENTIFIED BY THE GAP ANALYSIS.

Strategies:

A. Maximize existing funding to strengthen childhood programs to ensure that providers (i.e., child care, home visiting) can operate financially stable programs and grow capacity over time.

B. Support providers and programs to recruit, retain, and train members of the childhood workforce through initiatives:

- Implement a marketing campaign for childhood professionals
- Adapt four-year college programs to align with early childhood pathways
- Develop a statewide Child Development Associate (CDA) program for high school students
- Expand the childhood workforce by offering financial support and incentives to recruit and retain professionals
- Use data to inform statewide and local efforts to maximize resources and investments in programs

BIG GOAL 2: IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

MISSOURI WILL DEFINE A VISION OF QUALITY FOR THE STATE AND PROVIDE ALIGNED SUPPORTS AND INCENTIVES FOR PROFESSIONALS IN ORDER TO DRIVE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF EARLY CHILDHOODPROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Background

Research is clear that the quality of experiences that children have with adults and their peers, both in the home and in care and education settings, can significantly improve child outcomes.[18],[19] The depth and frequency of positive, reciprocal interactions that children have with the adults in their lives can be a powerful predictor of children's success in school and later in life.[20] Further, high-quality services, such as home visiting, early intervention, or parent education programs, provide families with critical resources to support them to provide safe, supportive, and developmental environments for their children.[21]

To achieve its vision that all children are safe, healthy, and successful learners, Missouri is committed to ensuring that children receive high-quality care, education, and services, across the continuum of early childhood programs offered throughout the state, and that families have the information they need to make informed decisions about the quality of programs for their children.

18 https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/144-the-research-case-for-home-visiting
19 https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.103.6.2052
20 http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Policy_Framework.pdf
21 http://www.pewtrusts.org/~/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/home_visiting/
    HomeVisitingAugust2011Reportpdf

Current State

Currently, Missouri is participating in a quality assurance pilot program for early learning programs, but does not have a clear, statewide definition of what high-quality early childhood experiences look like for children and families or how quality is measured across programs or settings. Programs operate with their own standards to ensure quality or model fidelity, and there is no north star for quality in the state. As a result, no one — parents, providers, or state decision makers — has visibility into the quality of experience children and families are having across care and education settings, nor other programs such as home visiting or early intervention. In 2016, the state took steps to better define and support quality in its early care and education programs through the establishment of a Quality Assurance Report (QAR). The QAR was created to develop a continuous quality improvement process for early learning programs and to provide families with information about the quality of these programs.

In 2023, six cohorts of early childhood providers have participated in QAR, and data illustrates that participation in a quality assurance system has led to an improvement in the quality of the programs over time.[22] OOC is currently in the process of compiling and analyzing data from pilots to select and refine a quality framework and improvement system. While a specific tool has not been selected to scale at this time, the state is looking at national best practices on early childhood quality frameworks and improvement systems, many of which center around teacher-child interactions, which are highly predictive of child outcomes.

In addition to enhancing the quality of care and education environments through the QAR process, OOC is committed to improving the quality of its early childhood services (i.e., home visiting, early intervention, parent education) to ensure alignment in quality experiences in all types of settings.

22 https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/qar-final-report-2021-pilot-program-cohorts-1-5

OBJECTIVE 1:
CLEARLY DEFINE AND COMMUNICATE A COMMON DEFINITION OF QUALITY. DEVELOP A CLEAR DEFINITION OF THE HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES SHOULD HAVE REGARDLESS OF THE PROGRAM OR THE SETTING IN WHICH THEY ARE SERVED

Strategies:

A. With feedback from stakeholders, finalize and publish a definition of quality childhood programming.

B. Align all QAR cohorts to a clear, simple framework that uses quality indicators to measure the quality of experience children have in care and education settings, across the state, regardless of program or funding source.

C. Establish a common definition of quality for home visiting services, regardless of model.

D. Once established, communicate the definition of quality to all stakeholders, particularly families and professionals.

OBJECTIVE 2:
MEASURE CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS BASED ON THE DEFINITION OF QUALITY. ONCE DEVELOPED, USE INDICATORS OF QUALITY TO REPRESENT THE QUALITY OF CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

Strategies

A. Increase the number of early learning programs participating in QAR.

B. Publish quality indicators for QAR in an easily understood format so that families can make informed decisions and select programs that match their needs.

C. Implement the definition for quality home visiting services.

D. Use data to celebrate successes, elevate best practices, target additional supports for improvement, and inform future policymaking.

OBJECTIVE 3:
SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO IMPROVE IN QUALITY BY OFFERING RESOURCES, SUPPORTS, AND TRAINING ALIGNED WITH THE DEFINITION OF QUALITY. PROVIDE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES WITH THE NECESSARY RESOURCES FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ENSURE THAT ALL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES (E.G., PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, T.E.A.C.H./CDA SCHOLARSHIPS, APPRENTICESHIPS) ARE ALIGNED AND DRIVING TOWARDS THE SAME VISION FOR QUALITY.

Strategies:

A. Support early learning programs participating in QAR to practice continuous quality improvement using the results of onsite assessments by offering materials, information, and other resources.

B. Support home visiting providers to implement the definition of quality by providing resources and trainings Increase quality supports for child care providers by implementing regional networks of early care and education quality specialists statewide that offer targeted coaching, trainings, support, and technical assistance to providers in their region.

C. Strengthen the skills and competencies of the childhood workforce by increasing quality supports through initiatives:

  1. Launch a professional development system that includes access to no-cost required trainings and low-cost, on-demand trainings.

  2. Develop a list of preferred CDA vendors to assure quality of training.

  3. Provide training to professionals on topics such as trauma-informed care and developmental screening.

BIG GOAL 3: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

MISSOURI WILL IDENTIFY, SUPPORT, AND EMPOWER LOCAL LEADERS IN EVERY PART OF THE STATE TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STRONG COMMUNITYPLANS AIMED AT ENSURING ALL FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN CAN ACCESS HIGH- QUALITY PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND RESOURCES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

Background

Missouri cannot successfully provide access to high-quality early childhood programs and services across the state from Jefferson City alone. The diversity of the state requires a state-local partnership in which early childhood initiatives, aligned to a state level vision, can be tailored to the needs and challenges of a community. In addition to providing community context to the state, local leaders are also essential to ensuring that families are supported with the information and resources necessary to access services for which they are eligible.

Current State

Nationwide, there is not a consistent model for the local coordination of early childhood services.[23,24] Because of this lack of coordination, there is often not an entity in most communities that has a clear picture of the entire early childhood landscape. In many states, including Missouri, this often results in families struggling to navigate early childhood programs and services in their community. There are some examples of community-led initiatives focused on coordinating access to early childhood programs and services (e.g. Collective Impact home visiting grantees), but current efforts have not been scaled statewide.

Beginning in 2019, Missouri used funding from the Preschool Development Grant to implement regional collaborative networking sites in a few areas of the state. From 2020-2022, the state piloted an expanded approach to local coordination with designated leaders in many communities around the state and supported them to participate in a readiness phase to build community partnerships and enhance collaboration within their community.

To sustain the work resulting from this readiness phase, OOC plans to continue to support partnerships with a network of community leaders around the state. Community leaders will be OOC's local partner in each region of the state to increase awareness of, coordination of, and access to high-quality early childhood programs and services. To achieve these goals, community leaders will partner with existing community-based efforts focused on the local coordination of early childhood programs and services. OOC is committed to supporting community leaders as they take on this critical work, honoring their commitment to the children and families of Missouri.

23 https://www.capita.org/capita-ideas/early-childhood-districts
24 https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NutsandBolts2021_final1.pdf

OBJECTIVE 1:

ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE NETWORK OF COMMUNITY LEADERS CHARGED WITH A CLEARLY DEFINED SET OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES. BUILDING ON THE WORK FROM THE PILOT, ESTABLISH A NETWORK OF LEADERS STATEWIDE TO SERVE AS LOCAL PARTNERS FOR OOC.

Strategies:

A. Develop clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and deliverables for community leaders

B. Identify and, in areas without a community leader, recruit a community leader in every area of the state and resource them to complete their responsibilities

C. Implement ongoing and individualized support to community leaders based on their needs and local context

D. Develop common data points or indicators to measure the impact of community leaders

OBJECTIVE 2:

INCREASE COORDINATION OF EXISTING HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES IN EACH PART OF THE STATE THROUGH COMMUNITY LEADER INFRASTRUCTURE. SUPPORT COMMUNITY LEADERS TO DEVELOP A LOCAL EARLY CHILDHOOD PLAN, IN COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS, TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND COORDINATION OF EXISTING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS WITH THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF INCREASED ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES THAT PREPARE CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL.

Strategies

A. Support community leaders across the state to implement a local early childhood plan, aligned with the state vision, that meets the individual needs of the community

B. Support community leaders to identify the barriers faced by families in their community and as they grow in capacity over time to work towards addressing those barriers

BIG GOAL 04: MODERNIZE SYSTEMS AND IMPROVE OPERATIONS

MISSOURI WILL IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT CRITICAL SHIFTS IN OOC OPERATIONS TO IMPROVE THE EXPERIENCE OF FAMILIES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS AND TO YIELD IMPORTANT DATA TO INFORM POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING.

Background

Operations, systems, and processes are the back bone to a successful organization. Without strong operational practices, expanding access to services is often challenging. Families with young children in need of early childhood services are already facing many barriers to access, both personal and systemic. To minimize barriers where possible, OOC strives to modernize its systems and improve its operations, so that families are easily able to access the information and supports they need.

Current State

Due to outdated systems and the use of various platforms as a result of the consolidation of programs into one agency, OOC's systems are not currently serving families and professionals as well as they should. Despite the best efforts of staff, outdated systems result in lengthy, complex processes for families and professionals.

OOC is currently in the process of updating several of its existing systems, including its professional development system and Child Care Data System (CCDS). Additionally, OOC is developing an ECIDS, which will collect, store, maintain, and report aggregate early childhood information from nine of the state's early childhood programs.

As OOC seeks to improve these systems and processes, it is committed to prioritizing the experiences of families and providers to make sure the technological and operational improvements are aligned with the needs of the field. In addition to user experiences, OOC aims to hold a high standard of customer service and maintain two-way communication with families, providers, early childhood professionals, and other stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE 1:
MODERNIZE AND INTEGRATE DATA SYSTEMS. UPDATE DATA SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES TO COLLECT DATA EFFICIENTLY AND IN AN INTEGRATED MANNER, SO THAT INFORMATION ACROSS PROGRAMS CAN BE REPORTED IN NEAR-REAL TIME AND USED TO INFORM DECISION MAKING.

Strategies:

A. Acquire and/or upgrade data systems used by all programs in OOC to ensure information is collected in an electronic format that can interact with other data systems and be easily analyzed

B. Develop an ECIDS that unifies key early childhood data points collected by separate programs

C. Use data from ECIDS to produce unduplicated child counts and answer fundamental questions about utilization to help inform decision making

D. Report trends in data from ECIDS to stakeholders in a user-friendly dashboard that is in near-real time

E. Update the CCDS to integrate provider account/case management, time and attendance tracking, claims, payments, and background checks into one system

F. Update the professional development system to analyze up-to-date workforce data to identify recruitment and retention needs

OBJECTIVE 2:

IMPROVE OPERATIONS FOR FAMILIES, PROVIDERS, AND PROFESSIONALS TO EASILY NAVIGATE INFORMATION, FORMS, APPLICATIONS, AND RESOURCES FROM OOC. ORIENT OPERATIONS AROUND A CUSTOMER SERVICE MINDSET AND USE MORE EFFECTIVE PROCESSES TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND PROVIDERS.

Strategies:

A. Analyze critical touch points with families and providers for each OOC program based on a journey mapping process

B. Streamline the experience of families based on stakeholder feedback and insight from journey mappings

C. Ensure all online resources are up to date and easily accessible for families

    1. Identify opportunities to align eligibility requirements for various childhood programs

    2. Improve application processes for families to access programs and services, including supports throughout the process and updates on application status

D. Track key metrics to measure improvement in family and provider experience over time (e.g., processing time for applications, survey providers after their licensing review)

E. Explore approaches to reduce barriers for childhood professionals:

    1. Simplify completing credentials and logging required clock hours with a new professional development system

    2. Streamline the licensing process for providers, while maintaining health and safety standards

    3. Differentiate licensing monitoring by modifying the monitoring activities based on a program's compliance history

    4. Expedite processing timelines for child care subsidy approval, child care licensing approval, and background checks by modernizing systems and streamlining internal processes

CONCLUSION

The unification of childhood programming into OOC has presented a unique opportunity for Missouri to enhance coordination within the childhood system to better serve children, families, and professionals. OOC is capitalizing upon this opportunity and, through this plan, is setting a clear vision for a strong, unified childhood system. As articulated herein, all programs and services are working toward this vision and aiming to expand access to high-quality childhood services across the state.

OOC and its partners are eager to build upon their work in the past year and move toward a future where all of Missouri's children are safe, healthy, and successful learners who are prepared for school.