

Missouri's Agencies Are Working Together to Prepare Every Child For Success in School and in Life

Missouri's Early Care & Education Strategic Plan Overview

Missouri's Early Care & Education Strategic Plan describes a multi-year strategy to build and sustain a coordinated system of early care and education to support children from birth to age five. The strategic plan was developed with a focus on safety, health and learning that builds on a previous plan set forth by the Coordinating Board for Early Childhood (CBEC). The plan was created in partnership with multiple state agencies, several Missouri-based organizations committed to enhancing child well-being and over 1,800 Missourians, including families and early childhood professionals from various sectors in the early care and education system.

Vision

Young children are safe, healthy and successful learners, reaching their full potential.

Mission

Missouri's early care and education system is coordinated, accessible, adequately resourced and of high quality, designed to promote the well-being of young children and their families.

Guiding Principles for a Comprehensive System

Efforts to achieve the vision and mission set forth by Missouri's early care and education system are guided by a core set of principles:

1. Early childhood is the most intensive developmental period, where both positive and negative factors have the greatest impact on children's health and well-being.
2. Policies and practices that are equitable, culturally and linguistically responsive, inclusive and accessible provide the strongest foundation for children's success in early years and beyond.
3. Effective programs for young children respond to the totality of a child's health and developmental needs.
4. Children with disabilities are best served in natural environments and inclusive programs rather than separate, clinical or disability-focused settings.
5. Programs and professionals are equipped to build on each child's unique set of individual and family strengths and celebrate the range of diversity among those served.



6. Effective early childhood programs invite and support parents and family members, as fully engaged partners in the design and delivery of services.
7. The early childhood workforce is diverse and consists of professionals who are valued and compensated for their commitment, time and expertise.
8. Quality programs, informed by valid and reliable research representing Missouri’s diverse population, are the most effective.
9. Investments in prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective use of public funds and offer the greatest return on investment.
10. The coordination of programs and services at all levels results in administrative efficiencies and are more convenient for families.

Strong community engagement throughout the strategic planning process resulted in a strategic plan that addresses community-identified needs in Missouri’s early care and education system and proposes goals, strategies and action steps for system-wide improvement.



GOAL 1: BUILDING STRONG SYSTEMS

An effective early care and education system requires a connected, collaborative and comprehensive approach. The following systems-level priorities represent the foundational components that are necessary for strengthening systems.

Priority Area: Governance & Leadership

- Enhance capacity of state leaders to support early childhood initiatives.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of state agencies who make decisions about early care and education system.
- Review and recommend policies and protocols that support engagement of diverse set of stakeholders at state and local levels.
- Create and implement an ongoing review process for Missouri’s Early Care & Education Strategic Plan.

Priority Area: Collaboration & Coordination

- Encourage collaborative partnerships that facilitate young children’s development.
- Encourage partnerships that reduce fragmentation in Missouri’s early care and education system.
- Coordinate services to improve continuity for children and families.

Priority Area: Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

- Ensure equitable access to the early care and education system.
- Embrace the diversity of families participating in programs and services.
- Promote the use of inclusive practices.

Priority Area: Funding & Financing

- Ensure equity in the distribution of financial resources.
- Pursue funding sources that promote coordinated early childhood initiatives.
- Build public-private partnerships to secure and sustain financing.
- Recommend funding for programs and practices that improve outcomes for children, families and early childhood professionals.

Priority Area: Early Care & Education Policies

- Review and recommend policies that strengthen the early care and education system.
- Strengthen supports for subsidy-based care.
- Strengthen supports for licensed programs and services, including those seeking licensure.
- Strengthen supports for early care and education professionals.

Priority Area: Workforce & Professional Development

- Build and invest in a diverse and qualified early childhood workforce.
- Promote early care and education workers as professionals and advocate for their professional development and advancement.
- Coordinate professional development across sectors.
- Support early childhood professionals’ personal development and wellness.

GOAL 2: BRIDGING ACCESS & QUALITY

Strong foundations allow for the construction of sturdy bridges that link children and their caregivers to the programs and services they need to thrive. The following priorities represent Missouri’s commitment to providing and sustaining accessible, quality early care and education.

Priority Area: Access to Early Care & Education

- Improve access to quality programs and services across the early care and education system.
- Enhance access to comprehensive supports for families and children.

Priority Area: Quality Improvement Activities

- Define quality in the early care and education system.
- Support quality enhancement processes and procedures.
- Encourage transparency in reporting of quality ratings.



GOAL 3: BOOSTING SUPPORTS

Children must have access to comprehensive, evidence-based supports that promote safety, health and learning. The following priorities represent the personal, organizational and public supports that strengthen children's opportunities to reach their full potential.

Priority Area: Transitions

- Support children and families transitioning within the early care and education system.
- Support transitions for children and families moving from the early care and education systems to school.
- Adopt a statewide kindergarten entry assessment to evaluate school readiness.

Priority Area: Data Collection & Usage

- Identify agreed-upon elements to be included in an early childhood data system.
- Create an early childhood integrated data system.
- Strengthen system capacity to collect and report accurate data.
- Promote an understanding of the importance of data-based decision making.
- Improve public access to data.

Priority Area: Family Support & Engagement

- Promote family awareness of the early care and education system.
- Support families as active partners in the early care and education system.
- Improve strategies to reach families and children who are not currently engaged in the early care and education system.

Priority Area: Health

- Promote family and professional understanding of the importance of monitoring developmental milestones.
- Improve access to health and developmental screenings, including social emotional and mental health.
- Engage healthcare and mental health providers as early care and education collaborators.
- Strengthen access to comprehensive health programs and services.

Priority Area: Stakeholder Identification & Public Engagement

- Create and implement a statewide public information campaign about the value of early care and education.
- Build partnerships between early care and education and business leaders.
- Support stakeholders' efforts to be early childhood champions at the state and local levels.



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