



Year 2 Annual Program Performance Report

ESSA Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five

Kansas State Department of Education
Award No. 90TP0078-02-00

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1 Discuss in detail how you used the PDG B-5 grant to support the development or enhancement of your statewide comprehensive early childhood care and education system.

1.1 All in For Kansas Kids – the Kansas Early Childhood Strategic Plan

It is important to recognize the role of the Pre-School Development Grant (PDG) B-5 funding in fostering the development of Kansas’ [All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan](#)¹ in order to understand the impact of the PDG B-5 grant on Kansas’ statewide comprehensive early childhood care and education system. Developed in 2020 based on findings of the [Kansas Early Childhood Systems Building Needs Assessment \(January 2020\)](#)², the Strategic Plan laid out a vision for the development of the state’s Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) system over the next five years. The needs assessment and plan were built upon collaborative efforts of multiple state agencies, each with the designated authority for specific early childhood services and programs. Prior to this PDG-funded effort, there had not been a unified space in Kansas where systems-level decision-making occurred. To ensure appropriate oversight of the needs assessment, agency heads of state early childhood programs, convened by the [Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund](#)³ (the ‘Children’s Cabinet’), created a State Directors Team which provided the leadership needed to coordinate a comprehensive review of existing Kansas statutes, examine early childhood governance models in other states around the country, and collect information from across the state of Kansas to understand the needs of young children and their families. This team consists of representatives from the Children’s Cabinet, the [Kansas State Department of Education](#)⁴, the [Department for Children and Families](#)⁵, and the [Kansas Department of Health and Environment](#)⁶. The State Directors Team was ultimately integrated into the early childhood governance structure for the state. This collaborative structure allows for greater knowledge sharing and collaboration among state agencies.

“The broader All In For Kansas Kids infrastructure (weekly email updates, biweekly webinars, Recommendations Panel) has created a clear structure for sharing information and having conversations about systems-level work. This allows us to better narrow our focus and communications to issues specific to the programs our agency administers, and to more effectively collaborate with other agencies. The development of the Kindergarten Transitions Toolkit was a nice bright spot and example of this in action.”

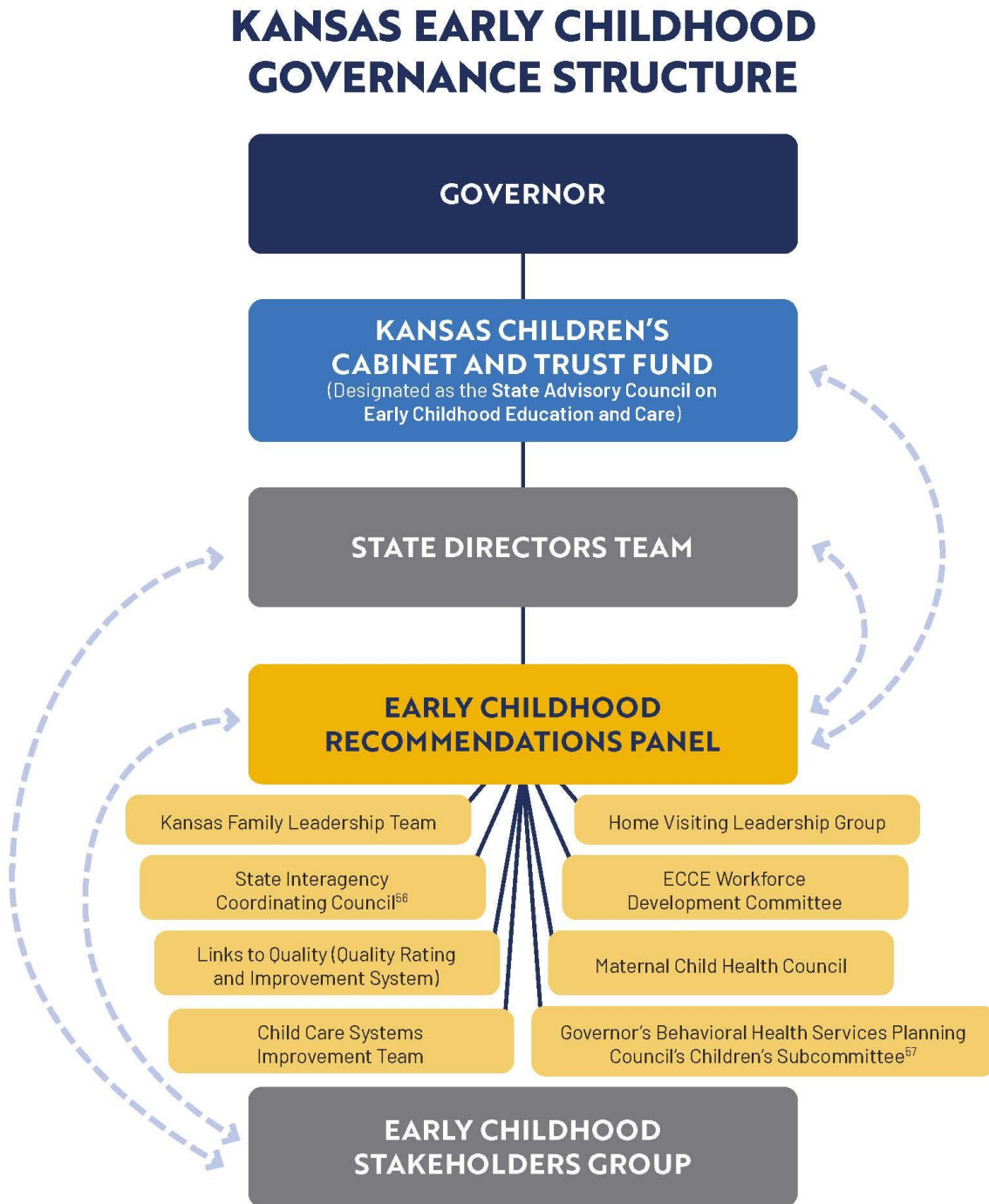
– Amanda Petersen, Director of Early Childhood, Kansas State Department of Education

1.2 Early Childhood Systems Building

The publication of the *All in for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan* coincided with the designation of the Children’s Cabinet as the Early Childhood Advisory Council (through Governor Laura Kelly’s February 6, 2020 [Executive Order 20-027](#)) and as the state lead for Kansas’ three-year PDG renewal grant. The Children’s Cabinet is supported by the State Directors Team as well as by the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel (the ‘Panel’), which was also created by the Governor’s Executive Order. [The Panel](#) is comprised of volunteers with early childhood expertise who are appointed to one-year terms and are tasked with

developing recommendations for the Children’s Cabinet, in its role as the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council, to advance the goals in the strategic plan. There are approximately 40 Panel members with broad representation: parents, program representatives, advocates, educators, researchers, and state agency staff. The Panel utilizes information and input from an array of early childhood councils, committees, and/or work groups with expertise, experience, and/or jurisdiction related to issues of interest. These various groups, most of which existed in advance of the strategic plan, were formally recognized as part of the early childhood governance structure with the publication of the strategic plan (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Kansas Early Childhood Governance Structure



The strategic plan also coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This public health crisis has significantly impacted Kansas children and families, the early childhood care and education workforce, and communities around the state. With this new and unexpected landscape, the strategic plan has served a critical role as a framework for decision-making; guiding response to the dire needs of the early childhood system in the throes of the pandemic, along with addressing the long-term needs in the system that predated the pandemic. The PDG grant has been utilized to support interventions advancing the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan. These goals are as follows:

1. **State-Level Coordination.** *The Kansas early childhood care and education system is structured and aligned for maximum impact.*

An example of state level coordination resulting from PDG support was redesign and branding of the [1-800-Children⁸](#) statewide parent helpline and online resource directory, and establishment of 1-800-Children as the Kansas Centralized Access Point (CAP) by the Children’s Cabinet in spring of 2021. Read more about this effort in Section 2.3.2.

2. **Community-Level Coordination.** *Kansas communities are empowered and equipped to create the best environments to raise a child.*

One effort to enhance local coordination was the development of Adaptive Technical Assistance, a statewide effort to provide technical assistance to communities and support local efforts to improve coordination and build connections among such initiatives as local Head Start programs, Child Care Aware, and Early Intervention/Part C services (known as Kansas Early Childhood Developmental Services in Kansas). Read more about this effort in Section 3.1.

3. **Family Knowledge and Choice:** *Kansas families have what they need to make informed decisions and can get services where they live and work.*

In May 2021, in an effort to create a “one stop shop” for families looking for child care resources, the State Directors group approved consolidation and expansion of the [Kansas Quality Network⁹](#) into one early childhood resource and brand identity for the state, [Navigate EC¹⁰](#). Read more about this effort in Section 6.2.1.

4. **Private Sector Collaboration.** *Kansas is a champion of public-private collaboration and seeks to create collaborative opportunities to invest in the future of Kansas kids and families.*

An example of public-private collaboration experiencing growth through PDG support is [Kansas Power of the Positive¹¹](#), a statewide project committed to the goal that all Kansas children grow up in safe, stable, nurturing environments. The coalition focuses on societal level interventions, including family friendly workplace policies and practices. In 2021, more than 30 professionals from across the state were trained to facilitate discussions with local businesses about family-friendly workplace policies and practices. During the grant year these trained facilitators provided presentations to over 2,000 participants across the state including employers, Rotary Clubs, and Society of Human Resource Manager (SHRM) groups.

5. **Capacity and Access.** *It is critical to the well-being of Kansas children that families have their basic needs met and that they have equitable access to quality early childhood care and education services.*

Given the extraordinary pressures placed on child care providers by the pandemic, in 2021 Kansas launched the [Child Care Health Consultant \(CCHC\) Network¹²](#), a free service available

to all licensed child care providers in the state. The network is coordinated by [Child Care Aware of Kansas](#)¹³ in partnership with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. Child care consultation services are available through a network of regional consultants to help child-care providers identify ways to support health, safety, and wellness, the importance of which was magnified substantially during this unprecedented pandemic. This program is now being funded by the Child Care and Development Fund. Read more about this effort in Section 4.1.

6. **Workforce.** *Kansas seeks to lead the way in developing, supporting, and valuing early childhood professionals.*

Examples of the activities under this goal are current efforts focused on updating the [Kansas/Missouri Core Competencies for Early Childhood and Youth Development Professionals](#)¹⁴, developing a unified early childhood professional career pathway to articulate the progression of professional development throughout a professional’s career, and launching a Request for Proposal (RFP) to build a workforce registry. Kansas is working with [Resultant Consulting](#)¹⁵ to draft the RFP, solicit project bids, select a vendor, and build out the registry. Read more about these efforts in Section 5.1.2.

7. **Quality and Environments.** *It is paramount that Kansas early childhood care and education programs and environments are high quality, safe, and nurturing.*

In addition to statewide quality efforts, PDG funding was used in 2021 to offer [Early Childhood Quality Subgrants](#)¹⁶ to foster local innovation to enhance quality in early childhood programs. These grants helped sustain and support community-led efforts in several distinct areas: child-care, connecting families to resources, Kindergarten readiness, and program quality improvement. Read more about these effort in Sections 4.3.2, 5.3, and 0.

The KIDS Network Safe Sleep program performance is enhanced by PDG funds that allow us to implement cross-cutting efforts like safe sleep messages, tobacco cessation strategies, breastfeeding counseling and maternal mental health resources to reduce sleep-related infant death. The funds allow us to meet families where they are, provide solution-focused strategies and give these young families the best start possible.

– Christy S. Schunn, Executive Director, Kansas Infant Death and SIDS (KIDS) Network, Inc.

For all the good work being done, it’s important to acknowledge that, in 2020 and 2021, Kansas families with young children continued to experience availability, accessibility, and navigation barriers across the Kansas early childhood care and education system. Families have been coping with the evolving day-to-day impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic while facing the reality that a critical service – child care – continued to reel from dwindling capacity. By the end of 2020 there were about 5,000 less child care slots in the state [than there were in 2017](#)¹⁷, and 32% less child care programs offering non-traditional hours. Over one-third of Kansas counties have only one slot for every 10 infants and toddlers. Our child care providers continue to struggle, trying to provide care for Kansas families in need while contending with an

unprecedented workforce shortage that cannot easily be addressed with short-term relief efforts. PDG support, however, has childhood stakeholders to seek solutions. As [Kansas Governor Laura Kelly said in 2019¹⁸](#) with the launch of Kansas’ PDG-funded efforts, “We are all early childhood stakeholders.” The state’s early childhood strategic plan provides both the vision and concrete strategies for change. It will take even greater collaboration and targeted action on multiple fronts to secure additional, much-needed investments and to meet our identified goals, but the strategic plan and ongoing system assessments have positioned Kansas to address longstanding inequities and gaps in infrastructure which represent barriers to full recovery from COVID-19 and the promise of a thriving Kansas for our youngest citizens.

2 How have PDG B-5 funds helped you use existing federal, state, local, and non-governmental resources more efficiently to strengthen the delivery of existing programs?

2.1 Child-care provider experience mapping

In Year 2 of PDG funding, significant efforts were undertaken to examine the regulatory burden associated with starting and managing a child care business in the state, with the goal of informing alignment and streamlining of regulatory requirements and standards. This process was informed by the [Child Care Provider Experience Mapping Project¹⁹](#), a project managed by the [University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research²⁰](#) and [Orange Sparkle Ball²¹](#) on behalf of the Children’s Cabinet. The purpose of this project was to understand the experiences of child care providers across the pre-licensing, licensing, and post-licensing process with a goal of understanding barriers to efficient operation of child care businesses. Over 400 providers responded to the statewide survey. While the survey highlighted many “bright spots” among the child care providers who participated, many providers struggle with the regulatory complexity of the system and have difficulty accessing the information and supports they need.

“A lot of providers just kind of feel like they have to deal with things on their own, especially if they’re a family child care and they don’t have help coming from outside. It’s kind of a lonely thing.”

– Survey Respondent, Child Care Provider Experience Mapping

The survey identified several regulatory burdens/barriers that informed key interventions discussed below, and development of the early childhood workforce career pathway discussed later in the report.

2.2 Aligning funding and licensing supports for providers

2.2.1 Program Administration Support

The Department for Children and Families partnered with Child Care Aware, through Kansas’ Quality Rating and Improvement System (known as [Links to Quality²²](#) or L2Q), to offer free Program Administration Support, which provides all licensed child care providers in the state, consultation focused on promoting solid business practices. Experienced child care business leaders provide business supports

and planning to equip child care providers with tools to strengthen their business. Since launching [L2Q Program Administration Supports](#)²³, 198 child care providers have received support, including 36 center-based programs, 155 family home-based programs, three school-aged programs, and four preschools. Recently, the program has been expanded to provide start-up child care business support. Funding is now being made available for eligible new child care providers. Anyone interested in opening a child care business can request an initial consultation with a regional consultant from the network to learn about start-up processes and resources that are available.

2.2.2 Kansas CommonApp

Early childhood programs in Kansas have a wide array of grants available to them through state agencies, philanthropies, and other public and private programs. In most cases, funding opportunities for early childhood programs in the state have been made available and managed through separate processes and systems. Recognizing the burden of using multiple systems (including understanding and navigating different application systems and requirements, multiple entry of information separately into each system, and the learning curve associated with the use of each new system) state agencies embarked on discussions about development of a common grants management platform. After exploring custom-built solutions and existing commercial platforms, a contract was finalized with [GoodGrants](#)²⁴ for a pilot program. As a result, the KansasCommonApp platform was built and to date has hosted 21 different grant opportunities offered by the Kansas State Department of Education and the Children’s Cabinet.

Grants that have been administered through the CommonApp include both PDG and non-PDG funded programs such as [Early Childhood Block Grants](#)²⁵, [Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Grants](#)²⁶, [Remote Learning Grants](#)²⁷ (administered through the Children’s Cabinet with funding from the Coronavirus Fund managed by the Kansas Office of Recovery), [All in For Kansas Kids subgrants](#)²⁸ (PDG funded), [Parents as Teachers](#)²⁹, and the [Kansas Preschool Pilot](#)³⁰.

In the Fall of 2021, the State Department of Education and Children’s Cabinet took this collaboration one step further by aligning eligibility requirements for the Kansas Preschool Pilot (Department of Education) and Early Childhood Block Grants (Children’s Cabinet) and developing an [aligned application](#)³¹. Applicants seeking funding to provide preschool services submitted one application, proposals were reviewed collaboratively by both agencies, and together, the agencies made determinations regarding the most suitable funding source. Currently, while other state agencies would like to be part of a single application system, Kansas Department of Children and Families and Kansas Department for Health and Environment have concerns about the functionality of the current grant platform. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment manages a custom-built grant platform. Discussions among the State Directors Team are focusing on the possibility of expanding their existing platform to a cross-agency platform.

“The CommonApp pilot has allowed us to streamline the grant process for agency staff, applicants, and our grant review teams. Applicants can more efficiently utilize information about their program for multiple applications and agency staff and reviewers can more easily access the applications for a more systematic approach to the entire process.”

Amy Meek, Early Childhood Director, Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund

2.2.3 Fingerprint-based background checks

Many early childhood programs in Kansas require background checks, including fingerprinting. Across the state the process for completing fingerprinting is fragmented and inconsistent, creating backlog and frustration for agencies providing oversight and programs seeking to recruit and onboard new staff. The effects of delays may include staff burnout and barriers to families' access to access child care and other services. Issues that have been identified include:

- **Accessibility.** It takes time to travel to the physical location of fingerprinting sites and sites have limited hours of operation, particularly outside of traditional business hours.
- **Processing time.** It can take several weeks to receive fingerprinting results, delaying the ability for a new hire to start work.
- **Administrative burden.** The process to oversee and monitor completion of the fingerprinting requires staff time.

Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and Kansas Department of Children and Families completed a survey in August 2021 about their current fingerprinting needs and challenges, as did representatives of the [Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services](#)³². These four agencies collectively oversee 8,500 fingerprints each month (700 – 6,500 per agency). The survey responses guided plans to streamline the process through a number of possible strategies: (1) increasing the number of livescan devices (an electronic means of creating and storing digitized fingerprint images, (2) housing devices at locations other than law enforcement, and (3) creating a centralized scheduling system for fingerprinting appointments.

Implementation of the plan is underway and locations of all livescan devices across the state are now being monitored through a real time website at <https://batchgeo.com/map/55e1845d73e5effa09c437a863f0305e>.

2.3 Common Resources for Communities and Providers

2.3.1 Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)

A key goal of the early childhood system is to identify needs of children and connect families to resources as early as possible. A specific objective promotes the use of the [Ages & Stages Questionnaires](#)³³ (ASQ-3 and ASQ:SE-2), evidence-based developmental and social-emotional screening tools to help identify children's strengths and areas where they may need support. Unfortunately, in Kansas less than half of children (44.3%) from 9 to 36 months of age receive developmental screening using a parent-completed screening tool ([National Survey of Children's Health](#)³⁴). To help providers with screening, Kansas launched a [statewide ASQ online system](#)³⁵. Since implementation of the statewide system, 280 providers have been trained in the use of ASQ tools, and in 2022 there have been 17,290 screenings (8,949 ASQ-3 and 8,341 ASQ-SE-2) across Kansas.

We've significantly increased access to developmental screenings in the state with the expanded Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) Online system. This statewide system allows us to reduce the local costs and more efficiently use resources.

– Amanda Petersen, Director, Kansas State Department of Education

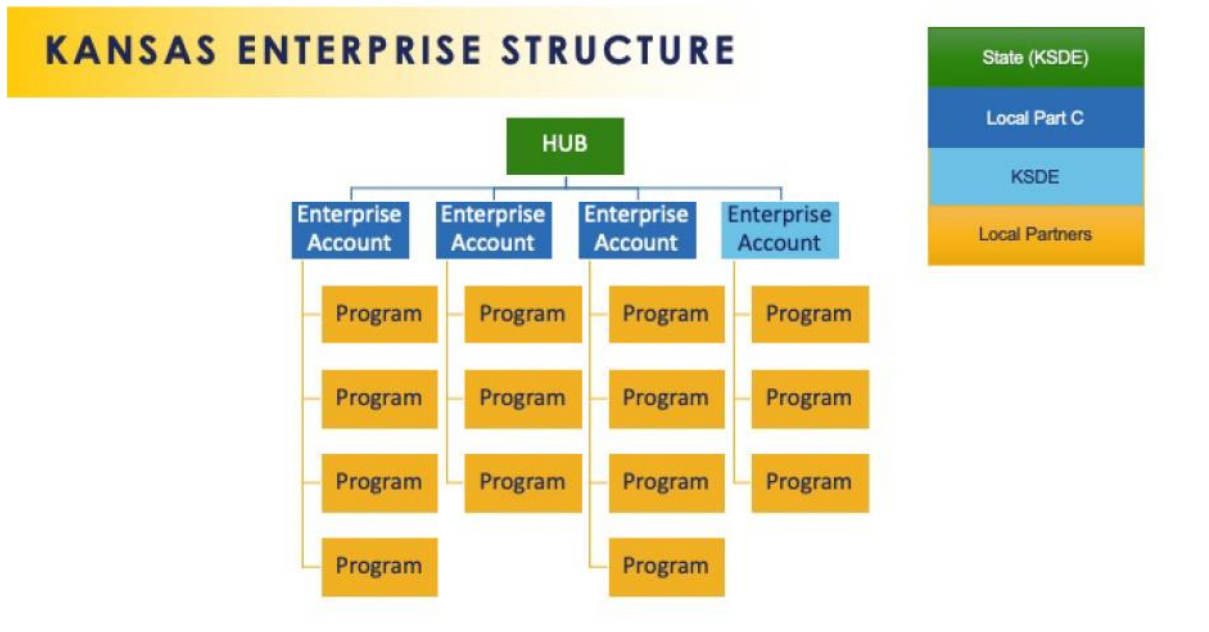
The state ASQ Online system is now available to any community partner serving children from birth to five. A regional system was created for the 29 Kansas Early Childhood Developmental Services (Part C) programs to manage all accounts in their service areas. This allows for transfer of individual records between programs in the Statewide ASQ Online system (if primary caregiver consent is provided) and provides data/information to participating programs. Additionally, every public school district and accredited private school system in the state has an account administered through the Kansas State Department of Education and completes ASQ screening with each student entering kindergarten.

“We have been successful from the start. I think it helps prepare our classrooms right out of the gate. It also helps with staffing decisions and teaching strategies. The report gives the parent and the teacher that feeling that they are a team from the beginning of the school year. It sets that tone that the parent’s voice is valued in their child’s education.”

-Penny Stoss, former Assistant Superintendent, Nickerson-South Hutchinson Unified School District 309

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Figure 2: Kansas ASQ Enterprise Structure



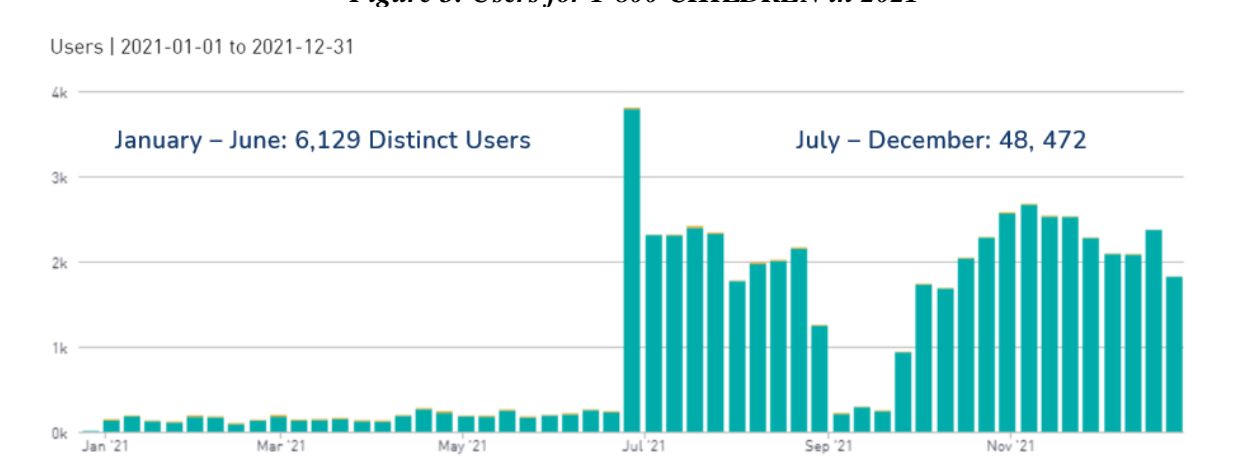
The Kansas Department of Health and Environment supports the effort by providing additional funding to local Part C programs to cover costs associated with initial implementation.

The state also maintains a [resource website](#)³⁶ that has tools for providers to promote and implement screening, including messaging to parents, consent form templates, and other resources.

2.3.2 1-800-CHILDREN

To normalize asking for help and to centralize resource gathering and sharing, at the February 2021 meeting of the Children’s Cabinet [1-800-CHILDREN](#)³⁷ was designated as the statewide central access point. 1-800-CHILDREN is a 24/7 resource available for parenting support and resource referral. It provides helpful resources and supports to families through their website (utilizing findhelp – formally Aunt Bertha -- for back-end administration) or by calling 1-800-CHILDREN or 1-800-332-6378. It offers free and confidential support in English and Spanish and other languages. The access point is maintained by the [Kansas Children’s Service League](#)³⁸ in collaboration with the Children’s Cabinet, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas State Department of Education, and Kansas Department of Children and Families. A marketing campaign to promote this service was launched in June of 2021, with dramatic results. In the six months following the launch (July – December 2021) more than 48,000 distinct users utilized the service, an 800% increase over the previous six-month period (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Users for 1-800-CHILDREN in 2021



3 How have PDG B-5 funds helped you improve the coordination and delivery of services across models and funding streams in the state's mixed-delivery system?

3.1 Community-level Technical Assistance (Adaptive TA)

Through an effort called Adaptive TA, technical assistance has been provided to communities to improve coordination and build connections among initiatives such as local Head Start programs, Child Care Aware, and Kansas Early Childhood Developmental Services (Part C). The program was initially focused on developing a regional system of support for developmental screening based on the establishment of 29 geographic-based ASQ Enterprise Accounts administered by local Part C networks. Over time, the program was expanded beyond that initial focus. In 2021, the Adaptive TA team served 263 community partners with 91 individual technical assistance supports, and 172 topic-specific webinars. Eighty of these community partners were organizations that had applied but did not receive quality subgrant funding. The

TA team was able to provide training and support in developmental screening, integrating diversity and inclusion materials into early childhood program, and grant writing. These providers were subsequently able to secure over \$22,000 in financial assistance to strengthen their work in these areas.

3.2 Enhancing Collaboration Through Referral Systems

Several communities utilize the [Integrated Referral and Intake System \(IRIS\)](#)³⁹ to refer families to needed services. IRIS is a web-based, bi-directional referral tool that streamlines communication between community providers offering services to individuals and families. IRIS is a technology-enabled approach but is based on community-based leadership and relationships, and on peer learning among IRIS networks in Kansas and several other states. In the past year IRIS supported 13 Kansas networks, including connecting networks with Adaptive TA described in Section 3.1. During the year, a new IRIS network was launched in northwest Kansas serving Rawlins, Thomas, and Logan counties. Coordination of the network will be facilitated by a full-time employee of the Northwest Kansas Education Service Center and LiveWell Northwest Kansas to support both IRIS and ASQ Online administration. A Kansas City metropolitan area network (including Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas and Jackson County in Missouri) was launched in early 2022. Referral activity has involved WIC, MCH, primary care providers including safety net clinics, behavioral health providers, and several local Community Health Workers. Early results indicate strong uptake of the new network: more than 50% of the 105 participating partner organizations made and/or received a referral during the first two months and 67% of completed referrals resulted in enrolling a child or family in a needed service. In Sedgwick County, Kansas Department of Children and Families is being integrated into IRIS through a pilot program and made 30 referrals to nine community organizations in the first quarter.

3.3 Coordinated Strategic Planning and Care Coordination

Kansas adheres to “whole-person” care coordination that takes into account the person, their circumstances, and their educational, social, behavioral, developmental and financial needs. A new program utilizing this approach is called Bridges. Managed by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, [Bridges](#)⁴⁰ was developed in response to data demonstrating that many families experience a gap in family support when children age out of Part C services and are not evaluated and/or connected to resources. Using [Holistic Care Coordination](#)⁴¹, Bridges Care Coordinators are available to assist families in transitioning children from Part C to Early Childhood Special Education (“Part B”) and/or other community programs. In 2021, Bridges developed a [Holistic Care Coordination Toolkit](#)⁴², provided five “COVID Support through Care Coordination” sessions in conjunction with the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics using [Project ECHO \(Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes\)](#)⁴³, and supported coordinators in five communities. Based on the growth of the Bridges and Holistic care coordination work, there are plans to add three new offices in the next year and expand that over time to between 12-15 offices across Kansas.

Another example of coordinated provision of services is the State Home Visiting Leadership Team, consisting of representatives from Parents as Teachers, Healthy Families, MIECHV (Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting), Early Head Start, Head Start, and Universal Home Visiting. In 2021, there was consensus among the group to focus on redesigning the Universal Home Visiting (UHV) model. UHV provides support to pregnant women and postpartum women with children up to one year of age. Unlike many other programs, there are no eligibility requirements. The goal is to expand the program statewide and allow for a limited number of visits with moms and babies (generally one to 2 visits) followed by a “warm referral” to other home visiting programs (and/or other services) if warranted. The group

worked collectively with a marketing firm to launch a communications campaign to create awareness of home visiting in Kansas with a goal of connecting more families to UHV and other home visiting programs. The working group has also ensured that UHV programs are updated in 1-800-Children, in IRIS networks, and is finalizing a MCH Overview Guidance document that can serve as a toolkit for programs interested in developing UHV.

4 Taking into account the realities of COVID, describe how PDG B-5 funds have helped you develop recommendations to better use existing resources to serve more children and families and improve the overall participation of all children in a mixed-delivery system of federal, state, and local early childhood care and education programs.

It is widely recognized that there is not sufficient capacity in the early childhood care and education system in Kansas to meet the needs of all children and families, and a principal goal of the *All in for Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan is to guide efforts develop an efficient, well-integrated system that can serve the needs of more children and families. While PDG funding has helped support efforts to enhance system-wide capacity, COVID-19 has placed extraordinary pressures on the system and has made it even more difficult for some families to access services. Among child care programs, for example, Kansas lost 78 providers and 938 slots from the total desired capacity of all programs between 2019 and May, 2021, and another 279 programs from June through August, 2021, according to the recently-released [2021 Supply Demand Report](#)⁴⁴ from Child Care Aware of Kansas. This year there are 21 counties with no slots available for infants and toddlers, up from 16 last year (2021 Supply Demand Report).

Much of work supported by PDG has been focused on bringing together early childhood partners around the state to address the challenges of the pandemic that have had such a devastating impact on the early child care and education system. The work has not been easy and has not been able to fully mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on child care providers around the state. However, many around the state believe that without these efforts the state's child care community would be even worse off. We will highlight here some of the efforts undertaken in the last year to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the system and to promote capacity building.

4.1 Consultation Supports

A higher quality child care program can lead to higher enrollment and more referrals. Early in 2021 Child Care Aware of Kansas, with the support and partnership of Kansas Department of Health and Environment and Kansas Department of Children and Families launched the [Child Care Health Consultant \(CCHC\) Network](#)⁴⁵ to provide one-on-one support for child-care programs to address unique challenges associated with the pandemic. This is a free service available to all licensed providers in the state to identify ways to support health, safety, and wellness efforts. Through multiple funding sources, the program has provided access to consultation through a system of regional consultants. The role of these regional Child Care Health Consultants (CCHC) is to promote the health and development of children, families, and staff and to ensure a healthy and safe child care environment.

Table 1 highlights a few of the many topics on which the CCHC Network and the Child Care Health Consultants offer guidance.

Table 1: Areas of Guidance for the CCHC Network

Improving playground safety	Perfecting drop-off and pick-up procedures
Setting daily routines	Developing and posting rules for parents and kids
Designing activities to include children of all ages and abilities	Establishing hand-washing procedures to prevent illness
Administering medication safely	Having difficult conversations with parents
Creating a checklist for staff to follow	Educating staff or parents on screen time
Providing referrals for children who may have developmental issues	Accessing community resources
Budgeting, insurance, taxes, and other business practices	Protecting yourself from liability when accidents and illnesses occur

The Department for Children and Families and Child Care Aware also partnered together, through Kansas’ Quality Rating and Improvement System (known as Links to Quality or L2Q), to offer free Program Administration Support. Program Administration Support is a free service available to all licensed child care providers in the state of Kansas. Focused on promoting solid business practices in child care environments, it offers one-on-one coaching and planning sessions that are provider and program driven.

4.2 Connecting High-Need Families to Resources

The early childhood needs assessment noted how difficult it can be for families to “connect the dots” to all the resources available to them to help their families thrive. One effort to address this need is the Kansas Department of Children and Families Resource Navigators. These are early childhood staff working in the highest-volume department field offices, whose role is to meet with families coming in for one or more services and assessing their needs for other supports. Their goal is to help families who may be unaware of available supports to connect to those resources. Four Resource Navigators were staffed in four field offices (Emporia, Kansas City, Topeka, Wichita). These represent high-volume offices that serve a high proportion of low-income families and families of color, and the Navigators have worked with 2,900 individuals to date. The program has recently added Navigators in Salina, Lawrence, and in Pittsburg (in the state’s southeast corner which is home to some of the state’s poorest counties).

Another recently-launched effort is [Thriving Families, Safer Children⁴⁶](#), a public private partnership working along with parents, youth, and communities, to create a more just and equitable child and family well-being system that benefits all children and families. The initiative seeks policy and systemic reform to break harmful intergenerational cycles of trauma and poverty by rethinking how child welfare systems function to prioritizing strengthening families and building resiliency, rather than separating families. Kansas is one of 18 states or jurisdictions selected to participate in round two of the national program, and has created a partnership among the Children’s Cabinet, Kansas Department of Children and Families, Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the University of Kansas, the Kansas Children’s Service League, and individuals with lived experience of the child welfare system. Kansas is working to revise statutory definitions of neglect and mandatory reporting to clearly differentiate maltreatment from poverty, and to align Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and other public health initiatives to strengthen low-income families.

4.3 Funding Supports

Several grant opportunities have been made available to early childhood care and education providers through PDG funding, and the *All in For Kansas Kids* also played a primary role in informing funding decisions for the use of pandemic relief funds to support early childhood providers and to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. These efforts have been critical in preserving/enhancing capacity of these programs during the tumultuous past few years.

4.3.1 Hero Relief Program

With pandemic relief funding, Kansas Department of Children and Families partnered with Child Care Aware of Kansas to offer Hero Relief Program grants to license child care providers impacted by the pandemic. Beginning in 2020, several of grants were made available to child care centers and group child care programs licensed by Kansas Department of Health and Environment who had lost child care subsidy income due to the pandemic. These were noncompetitive grants available to all programs in good standing with the state child care licensure program. In early 2021 Sustainability grants between \$5,000 and \$60,000 were made to both open and temporarily closed child care facilities in Round 1 of this funding to continue paying wages of employed staff and to cover other operational expenses (rent/mortgage/utilities, goods and services, mental health supports, and equipment/supplies). During Round 1 \$43,590,000 was awarded to 3,171 child care programs. A second round of Sustainability grants was launched on October 1, 2021, and another \$47,560,000 was disbursed to 3,522 programs. A third round opened on March 1, 2022. Award amounts for Round 3 will vary from \$16,200 to \$162,000 (based on type and size of program). Awards for the 3,350 child care programs that applied will be announced soon (Note: as of May 31, 2022, 3,284 applications have been approved).

Additionally, through the Hero Relief Program, Kansas expanded eligibility guidelines to provide financial child care assistance to any Kansas worker making 250% or less of the federal poverty level needing child care for their children. The expansion included waiving the family share for essential workers and reducing the share for all others. The eligibility period was extended from 6 to 12 months.

4.3.2 PDG Quality Subgrants

The Children's Cabinet utilized some PDG funding for subgrants to encourage innovation among local early childhood programs and to enhance services for children and the families they serve. Subgrants fell into five categories: Child Care Access, Rural Child Care, Connect Families to Services, Kindergarten Readiness, Quality of Care. The latter three categories will be described elsewhere in this report, but subgrants for Child Care Access and Rural Child Care are described here. The purpose of Child Care Access grants was to provide resources to test local solutions to increase access and availability of high-quality child care for children birth to five in key target populations including:

1. Infants and toddlers,
2. Children in low-income households,
3. Children in families with migrant workers,
4. Children with special health care needs,
5. Children experiencing homelessness, and
6. Children involved in foster care.

Recruiting and retaining providers through signing and/or retention bonuses, professional development, and other strategies; operational changes to offer non-traditional hours; and “pipeline” programs to train students in early childhood careers are examples of strategies supported by the Child Care Access grants. Rural Child Care grants supported similar strategies to those mentioned above as well developing partnerships with rural businesses to develop innovative mechanisms to develop and sustain child care programs. These grants were available only to rural providers (defined as those in counties with less than 40 persons per square mile). Through two rounds of funding, grants totaling \$1,410,000 (for Child Care Access) and \$1,522,250 (for Rural Child Care) have been awarded. Evaluation and dissemination of findings and lessons learned is in early stages.

4.3.3 Community Tax Service Program

Another unique program available to child care providers in Kansas is the [Community Service Tax Credit Program](#)⁴⁷ (CSP). The Kansas Department of Commerce administers the program and authorizes approved non-profit organizations to offer tax credits to donors who make contributions to approved projects. These projects are generally major capital projects such as a facilities renovations/upgrades to create value and serve more clients or enhance program quality. Applicants may request up to \$200,000 in tax credits; applicants in rural areas (<15,000 population) are eligible for a 70% credit and in non-rural areas a 50% credit. The Department of Commerce has set aside 25% of their CSP credits for early childhood providers in 2022. The application window opened March 1, 2022, and closed April 30, 2022, with award decisions expected soon (Note: Governor Kelly announced on July 12, 2022, that almost \$ 1 million in tax credits were awarded to non-profit organizations working to boost the supply of child care options). State level partners made significant efforts to share information about this program with early childhood providers statewide, featuring CSP staff in stakeholder meetings and informational webinars and disseminating information through multiple channels including the All in For Kansas Kids weekly update, social media, and more.

5 Taking into account the realities of COVID, describe how PDG B-5 funds have helped improve program quality, and the degree to which you have been able to maintain access and availability of services.

Early childhood care and education professionals are central to quality of service and program delivery. Strengthening the workforce through professional development, personal and professional support, and competitive compensation models are key to ensuring that quality, access, and availability of services is maintained. Building local capacity and establishing quality standards can also be an integral part of improving quality of access. There were many initiatives that were implemented in this year to strengthen the workforce, empower local providers, and build common quality standards.

5.1 Workforce Initiatives

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a number of barriers to stability within the child care sector. The common narrative in most conversations with providers of early childhood and care, particularly in the domain of child care, is the urgent need for better compensation, benefits, and training for the early childhood workforce. To support workforce improvement efforts across the system, the Children’s Cabinet, state agency leaders, and several early childhood committees and teams such as the Child Care Systems Improvement Team, the Workforce Development Advisory Group, and the Early Childhood

Recommendations Panel have been working collaboratively to identify and build statewide system supports needed to strengthen the child care workforce. The efforts on this front are designed to create a cohesive system that enables the recruitment, retention, and advancement of a diverse workforce that is prepared and qualified to meet the changing needs of young children and families. This system is being built to ensure that professionals feel respected and valued and have the resources they need to deliver high-quality services to children and families. While the following subsections highlight a few key initiatives, there are many professional development activities that have continued throughout the pandemic or have arisen in response to COVID-19 to meet the needs of our early childhood workforce. Many Kansas partners including [Kansas Child Care Training Opportunities, Inc⁴⁸](#). (KCCTO) are working together to develop and offer trainings. KCCTO provides training directly and also coordinates with other early childhood agencies to promote training opportunities statewide.

5.1.1 Career Pathway

Recruiting and retaining professionals is a top priority for Kansas early childhood leaders. There is clear recognition of the impact low wages and minimal benefits has on the workforce, and state agency leaders are actively exploring ways to leverage PDG funding or other federal relief funding to support these efforts. Fundamental to a wage strategy is a [Career Pathway⁴⁹](#) that articulates and offers a structure for incentivizing professional growth of early childhood professionals. A task force, known as the Professional Development Implementation Team, in consultation with the Workforce Development Advisory Group and in partnership with consultant [Bank Street⁵⁰](#), has been exploring options and developing a draft pathway (see [Error! Reference source not found.](#)). The goal is to prepare and support 6000 child care professionals over the next four years to address the lack of child care in the state. The Children’s Cabinet is also exploring alignment with [Career Technical Education \(CTE\)⁵¹](#) pathways which support educational institutions in their efforts to develop student pathways that lead students to college and career readiness.

Figure 4: Potential Career Pathways envisioned for Child Care Professionals



5.1.2 Workforce Registry

Kansas is one of only seven states without a workforce registry for early childhood providers. Kansas envisions a system that will offer early childhood professionals a place to articulate and document professional development goals and also document their educational and quality improvement accomplishments.

A workforce registry would work as an information system that promotes professional growth and development, captures data about practitioners in a variety of roles, aligns with state career level systems and places individuals on a career level based upon verified educational information, recognizes, and honors professional achievements, and informs policy makers and partners. Registry data can be integrated into an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) to provide clear insights about the early childhood care and education workforce.

Efforts to establish a professional development workforce registry in Kansas are underway. Work began in 2021 spring with a robust exploration of current registry systems across the country, peer learning calls with other state systems, and assessment of stakeholder expectations for what is needed in Kansas. This work helped drive alignment with other foundational elements, such as a career pathway, core competencies, and quality recognition. Currently, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet is leading work to map the current system landscape and build a future-state roadmap for what the Kansas workforce registry will have capacity to do. There is also a formal RFP underway to secure a vendor to build the workforce registry.

The registry itself will be funded by federal relief support via the Child Care Development Fund but coordination and cohesion within the larger early childhood system will be the responsibility of PDG-funded staff and supports.

5.1.3 Updated Core Competencies

One of the strategic goals in the state's early childhood plan is to revise and align core competencies and the development of credentials across all early childhood care and education positions, drawing from national evidence-based practices and standards. The goal is to ensure that the core competencies include knowledge and performance competencies that prepare professionals to support all children at all levels of ability. The [Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals](#)⁵² (Kansas and Missouri) were last updated in 2011, drawing from previous versions (2001, 2006) and updated to reflect current research in the field. A subgroup of the Workforce Development Advisory Group, with 14 members, began meeting in 2021 to update the core competencies. They have been reviewing the current Kansas/Missouri core competencies, evaluating core competency frameworks of other states, and working on adjusting the leveling of existing competencies to better align with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) 2020 Professional Standards and Competencies. They are working with partners in the Advisory Group to ensure alignment with the career pathway being developed.

5.2 Quality Rating and Improvement System

The Kansas Quality Rating and Improvement System is coordinated by Kansas Department of Children and Families and is known as [Links to Quality](#)⁵³ or L2Q. L2Q was created with the support of early childhood organizations across the state and provides a statewide network of resources that support quality improvement efforts of child care providers statewide and empowers families with information that goes beyond health and safety in order for them to make informed decisions about child care. It was designed to promote the strengths child care providers bring to their work every day. In this system, providers can earn Quality Recognition Links in recognition of their accomplishments in the areas of Program Leadership, Family Partnerships, and Learning and Development.

The Department for Children and Families launched a two-year L2Q Pilot in April 2018, working with over 30 child care agencies that were part of five learning communities in Kansas City/Wyandotte County, Junction City/Geary County, Maize/Sedgwick County, Independence/Montgomery County, and Ulysses/Grant, representing urban, suburban, and rural communities from across the state. These programs successfully participating in the Two-Year Links to Quality Pilot, earning recognition as Founders of Links to Quality, representing both their accomplishments as well as their contributions to L2Q. There were some [key outcomes](#)⁵⁴ that emerged from the pilot:

- *Business Growth:*
 - 80% of the providers who took the Business Administration Scale (BAS) post-pilot assessment raised their scores by an average of 17%.
 - 100% of the providers who took the Program Administration Scale (PAS) post-pilot assessment raised their scores by an average of 18%.
- *Peer Support:*
 - Many providers also developed close-knit relationships with others in their learning communities. They looked to each other for advice, information, and friendship. Several

times during the pilot, providers went out of their way to help one another when challenging personal circumstances made participating in the pilot difficult.

- *Learning:*
 - The programs reported that participating in the pilot gave them a safe place to grow their programs. The pilot set high standards for them to achieve, they said, while also providing them with the support and encouragement they needed to meet these standards.
 - Connecting with other early childhood professionals who work in different kinds of child care environments enabled them to learn new things.

When the pilot concluded in April 2020 the full roll-out was paused (given many pressures caused by the pandemic), and not until 2021 did discussions resume on preparing a full roll-out. Project partners, with input from participants in the five learning communities, have been revising standards with a goal of rolling out L2Q statewide in the spring of 2023 aligned with launch of the state’s career pathway and workforce registry. As noted earlier, through L2Q the Department for Children and Families has partnered with Child Care Aware throughout the pandemic to continue to offer an array of supports to licensed child care providers and those interested in starting a child care business.

5.3 PDG Quality Subgrants

Particularly with the onset of the pandemic, [Subgrants to Improve Quality of Care⁵⁵](#), funded with federal PDG funding, were essential resources that helped communities and service providers address needs and gaps through locally-driven ideas and approaches. These grants were one of five types of PDG subgrants issued by the state. The goal of Subgrants to Improve Quality of Care were to test localized solutions to enhance quality of care. Applications focused on a wide array of approaches, including enhancing environments and learning tools (enhancing outdoor educational spaces, purchasing toys and books, etc.), developing parent peer support programs, and projects focused on addressing children’s mental health and social emotional learning. Subgrants awarded in 2020 totaled \$355,000 and in 2021 totaled \$481,000, a total investment of \$836,000.

The Children’s Cabinet is engaging closely with grantees as they implement approaches, both to understand what is working and to identify and help work through challenges. The PDG evaluation team will work closely with staff from the Children’s Cabinet to document information on project successes, barriers to implementation, and other lessons learned to assess project impacts at a local level and to inform ongoing development of the statewide early childhood care and education system.

“The PDG Quality Subgrants gave providers the opportunity to implement an idea or approach that didn’t fit with the grant opportunities normally made available to them. We are excited to learn from the grantees ways we can enhance the ECE system in the future.”

Amy Meek, Early Childhood Director, Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund

6 How have PDG B-5 funds helped maximize family and parental choice and knowledge of engagement with existing programs in the state’s mixed-delivery system, easing access to all services?

Kansas’ early childhood system leaders aspire to create a system is built around the needs of children and families. The voice of parents and families is critical to program and system development efforts, and system-building efforts are also focused in a significant way on ensuring parents and families have the knowledge they need to easily and efficiently access the services needed to ensure their children thrive. The initial early childhood needs assessment highlighted how fragmented the system has been in Kansas and how families are left to “connect the dots” to ensure their children receive the services they need. At the same time, significant efforts were underway – and continue to this day – to ensure a child and family-centered system of early childhood care and education. Efforts have focused on three separate but related areas. The first is in promoting family/parent leadership in system-building efforts (highlighted in Section 6.1). Section 6.2 discusses some program- and system-level efforts to enhance parent knowledge to help them “connect the dots.” Section 6.3 shares information on some of Kansas’ unique approaches to capture the voice of parents and families from around the state to ensure their stories are heard and can help inform ongoing work of fostering system change.

6.1 Promoting Family/Parent Leadership and Engagement

The activities in the following subsections were built on the vision that families will be equal partners in planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of services that affect them. Ensuring families are at the center of decision-making will result in a “nothing about us, without us” system.

6.1.1 Family Advisory Council

The [Family Advisory Council](#)⁵⁶ (FAC), led by Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s Bureau of Family Health, is made up of family members and consumers who are interested in helping drive positive changes to maternal and child health services and inform programs for women, children, and families. Originally developed to support the [Children with Special Health Care Needs](#)⁵⁷ program, with support of PDG the Bureau has expanded the Council to five workgroups for each MCH domain: Maternal/Woman, Early Childhood (Birth –5 years), Childhood (6-11 years), Adolescence (12-21 years), and Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN). FAC membership continues to grow, with five new members joining in 2022. The FAC meets every other month, and parent representatives of the Council also serve on the Family Leadership Team that was created as part of the states’ early childhood governance structure.

6.1.2 Family Leadership Team

The [Family Leadership Team](#)⁵⁸ is comprised of family leaders and representatives from Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Department of Children and Families, and the Children’s Cabinet. The FLT began work in the summer of 2021 to inform and coordinate with current family partnership efforts across the early childhood care and education system.

- The Family Leadership Team has helped inform several concepts and resources related to family partnership, including efforts to increase alignment among state agencies and the development of a Family and Consumer Partnership Toolkit, [Engaging Families and Consumer in Program Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation](#)⁵⁹.

- As of March 2022, The Family Leadership Team is determining plans for expansion to increase the number of family leaders and community-based organizations in their membership and coordinating with the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel work around a shared system definition of family partnership.

6.1.3 *Parent Leadership Conference*

The Kansas Children’s Service League held the state’s [Parent Leadership Conference](#)⁶⁰ in July of 2021, with live evening sessions on July 27-29. The event was designed to help and strengthen the voice of Kansas parents. The conference brought national speakers as well as statewide experts to collaborate with parents on issues that are important to families. It provided a unique opportunity for parents to network as well as educate professionals. The objectives of the conference were threefold:

- Provide tools for families to make beneficial decisions for themselves, their children, and their communities.
- Provide opportunities for the parent’s voice to be raised in a conference setting with peers.
- Empower families to understand the importance of family engagement and its link to educational success for all children.

Most sessions were pre-recorded so participants could listen at their convenience. There were 2 keynotes that were live and a parent café as well.

6.1.4 *Supporting You*

[Supporting You](#)⁶¹ is a peer support program led by Kansas Department of Health and Environment and is increasing outreach and considering expansion to target support for adoptive and kinship parents and parents of children with developmental disabilities. Through this program, families share information and gain ideas from others who have experienced similar situations.

- The Supporting You platform is undergoing significant updates to enhance user experience and host training opportunities.
- Supporting You is partnering with [Foster, Adopt, Connect](#)⁶² to become a network program focusing on both foster and adoptive parents.

6.2 Enhancing Parent Family Knowledge/Choice

The [Kansas Early Childhood Systems Building Needs Assessment \(January 2020\)](#)⁶³ highlighted some gaps in awareness among Kansas families about services and programs that are available in their own communities. Furthermore, it was recognized that families do not always have equitable access to those opportunities. Families must be empowered with the right information and tools to make choices and ensure equitable access to services.

6.2.1 *Kansas Quality Network and Navigate EC*

To help ensure equitable, easy access to child care-related information and resources, the [Kansas Quality Network \(KQN\)](#)⁶⁴ website is frequently updated with resources and information. Currently, efforts are underway to expand and reimagine the Kansas Quality Network website. The new website will be known as Navigate EC and will offer families, providers, and communities a streamlined path to Kansas early

childhood services, information. The website will serve as connective tissue between existing and forthcoming elements of the Kansas early childhood system as an extension of the All In for Kansas Kids effort.

- In May 2021, the Early Childhood State Director’s group approved the consolidation and expansion of the Kansas Quality Network and the early childhood resource brand identity, Navigate EC.
- December 2021 through April 2022, a steering committee was convened to provide strategic oversight. The committee consists of representatives from Kansas Department of Children and Families, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Kansas State Department of Education, the Children’s Cabinet, Kansas Deaf-Blind Project, and University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research.
- Between November 2021 through February 2022, interviews, focus groups, and a digital audit of the KQN website were completed to inform the new site development.
- In May 2022, the Department for Children and Families launched [ChildCareInKansas.com](https://www.childcareinkansas.com)⁶⁵ to meet Child Care and Development Fund consumer education requirements (Section 2) previously satisfied by the Kansas Quality Network website.
- Content strategy, brand messaging, and website wireframes are in final revision at the time of this report.
- The buildout and testing of the website will occur Fall 2022, culminating in an expected Winter 2022 launch.

6.2.2 *Department for Children and Families Resource Navigators*

This program, described earlier in this report, places Resource Agents within the highest-volume, highest-need field offices (Kansas City, Topeka, Emporia and Wichita), works to triage families seeking services who are typically unaware of the broad range of supports available. Resource Navigators have met with 2,900 individuals across the 4 locations in Kansas.

6.2.3 *1800 CHILDREN Helpline and Directory*

The [1-800-CHILDREN](https://www.1800children.com)⁶⁶, the statewide parent helpline and online resource directory serving as the Kansas Centralized Access Point (CAP), was also described in detail earlier in the report. With PDG funding, significant structural upgrades were made to the system, and a marketing and social media campaign was launched that has resulted in substantial increase in utilization by Kansas families and providers.

6.3 Integrating Parent and Family Experience into System Development

[Our Tomorrows](https://www.ourtomorrows.com)⁶⁷ is a state-level, story-based collection data tool designed to collect narratives directly from Kansans to learn about how their needs are changing, how service providers are responding, and the general well-being of children and families. The Children’s Cabinet and other system partners use data from the Our Tomorrows StoryBank to understand both the needs of families and the real-time impact of changes and system improvements. Our Tomorrows engages community partners and families to share stories through rapid-cycle collection. Through a continuous collection of stories, Our Tomorrows tracks trends and elevates emerging opportunities for state and local action. The stories of Our Tomorrows offer specifics that help prioritize efforts, replicate more of what is already working, and try new approaches. This story-based project powerfully elevates Kansan voices through personal and insightful anecdotes. Additionally, it provides a unique and innovative way to identify patterns across experiences and to anticipate future issues that may impact the early childhood system.

The Our Tomorrows team works closely with state and local stakeholders to facilitate conversations around patterns and stories. These sensemaking sessions are forums for identifying action steps and potential solutions to complex problems. Participants in sensemaking sessions look for any surprises and insights that challenge the ways things are currently done. In these sessions, participants analyze and interpret story data using the SenseMaker framework and generate ideas for local change. From the discussion, participants generate ideas that can be tested and potentially implemented to better meet the needs of children and families. The data from these sessions are used by the Children’s Cabinet and other Kansas leaders for rapid-cycle analysis and decision making. Nearly 1,200 stories have been shared through Our Tomorrows in 2021, followed by three statewide, virtual sense-making sessions where patterns in data and stories were shared with early child providers and community partners, which included organizational representatives from a diverse array of organizations one might not expect in an “early childhood” forum such as long-term care providers, a sheriff, a jail administrator, and a historical society. Participants were invited to submit “action lab” applications for collaborative projects seeking innovative solutions to issues discussed in the sense-making sessions. A cohort of 34 grantees across Kansas were awarded \$166,000 (total) to test their ideas in “action labs.” Some of the creative approaches developed through these labs were intergenerational reading/learning projects, parenting classes for incarcerated individuals, creation of a fund among service providers to support payments for child care substitutes and developing family individualized success plans.

In early 2022 a new story-collection framework was developed to incorporate more targeted questions to facilitate issue-specific exploration of the most emergent pressing needs of children and families. More than 40 stakeholders at all levels of the child care system and from across the state informed the framework re-design to incorporate a focus on the child care crisis. Initial rollout of the new framework was scheduled to begin after the end of PDG Year 2 (and has begun as of this reporting date).

7 Taking into account the realities of COVID, describe how PDG B-5 funds have helped enhance school readiness for children from low-income and disadvantaged families, and assisted in the development of effective transitioning practices for children into elementary school.

The Kansas Early Childhood Needs Assessment highlighted the challenge of transitions like Pre-K to Kindergarten for children and families. In response to those recognized needs, a variety of strategic interventions have been undertaken to support kindergarten readiness for all Kansas children. When both families and providers have the right information to understand the strengths and needs of children across the spectrum of care and education, and especially as they approach transitions, children are better prepared for success in kindergarten. As such, universally assessing the readiness of children has been a hallmark of Kansas’ early childhood system and continues to grow and improve. In addition, PDG-supported activities have led to the development of new resources both for children and for providers to ensure that Kansas children are supported in their transition into kindergarten.

7.1 Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot (ASQ®)

The Kansas State Board of Education identified Kindergarten Readiness as one of its five key outcomes to achieving the state Kansans Can vision for education in 2015. Evidence-based developmental screening is an essential tool to ensure teachers understand children’s needs so they can provide appropriate supports to the children they serve. Since 2018 all Kansas elementary schools have been required to

partner with families of incoming kindergarteners to administer both the ASQ-3® and the ASQ:SE-2® (the “Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot”). For the 2021-2022 school year, as part of a larger initiative to expand ASQ screening statewide, the Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot window opened in the springtime to allow school districts additional opportunity to integrate required developmental screenings into strategies to support transitions into kindergarten. Schools are expected to:

- Avoid the use of ASQ data as a gatekeeping tool to prevent 5-year-old children from entering kindergarten,
- Share ASQ data with each child’s kindergarten teacher, and
- Share ASQ data with families of those children screened.

Schools agreeing to these terms were allowed to apply to begin their 2021 Kindergarten Readiness Snapshot (ASQ®) after March 1, 2021; for schools that did not apply, the Snapshot window opened July 1.

Teachers have found that the data help them better understand children’s needs and to engage in deeper and more meaningful discussions with parents about their children’s growth. It has helped schools design environment and instruction to better meet the needs of incoming kindergartners, support aligned teaching practices and program planning, and support personalized instruction.

7.2 Resources for Families

7.2.1 *Kindergarten in Kansas booklet*

As part of the state’s efforts to promote kindergarten readiness, the Kansas State Department of Education and the [Kansas Parent Information Resource Center](#)⁶⁸ (KPIRC) partner to disseminate resources to families about how to prepare their children for this important transition. A resource document, the [Kindergarten in Kansas](#)⁶⁹ booklet, is widely disseminated to Kansas families. It is available electronically and in print. It is available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Swahili, and Burmese and is available free-of-charge through KPIRC. The booklet contains information about the process for enrolling children in kindergarten, information and tools to assist families help their children to transition into kindergarten, and a checklist for families to prepare their children to enter school. The booklet was updated in May 2021, and between May 2, 2021, and April 30, 2022, almost 37,000 booklets have been distributed statewide (28,060 in English, 6,192 in Spanish, 736 in Vietnamese, 690 in Swahili, 641 in Arabic, and 510 in Burmese).

7.2.2 *Dolly Parton Imagination Library*

The Children’s launched a statewide expansion of [Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library](#)⁷⁰ in September 2021. The Imagination Library sends a free, age-appropriate book every month to children age birth to five enrolled in the program. Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library capitalizes upon public and private sector collaboration to nurture early literacy, which is shown to positively impact children well into their grade school years and after. Since announcement of the statewide effort, ten new counties have entered the program in collaboration with the cabinet, meaning that at least portions of 91 of Kansas’ 105 counties are covered by the program. Imagination Library book kits were mailed to all licensed providers in these counties to promote the program. As of late March 2022, 42,455 free books are being sent out to children across Kansas every month. The Children’s Cabinet is establishing a dedicated Imagination Library of Kansas Advisory Committee to ensure a successful program in the state.

7.3 Resources for Schools and Communities

7.3.1 Kindergarten Transitions Toolkit

The Kansas Early Childhood Needs Assessment underscored the challenges families face during major transitions including the transition from Pre-K to kindergarten. A survey of school districts conducted as part of the assessment also found that only 35% of Kansas school districts have a formal process or plan for transitioning children from Pre-K outside of their own Pre-K programs into kindergarten. To support both school districts and local early childhood providers in building formal mechanisms to enhance Pre-K to kindergarten transitions and enhance kindergarten readiness, the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel created the “All in for Kansas Kids” [Kindergarten Transitions Toolkit](#)⁷¹. The toolkit includes a template Memorandum of Understanding that school districts and early childhood programs can use to develop formal, standardized processes for Pre-K to kindergarten transitions as well as an example workplan that outlines steps through which communities can develop specific processes, assign roles and responsibilities, develop timelines, and track outcomes. The Kindergarten Transitions Toolkit was approved by the Children’s Cabinet (functioning in its role as the state’s Early Childhood Advisory Council) in December 2020 and uploaded to the Children’s Cabinet website in early 2021. Since then, it has been widely distributed to communities through multiple communication channels to school districts and a wide array of early childhood providers.

7.3.2 Preschool Expansion

The Kansas Early Childhood Needs Assessment found gaps in the capacity of preschool programming to serve Kansas children, as well as specific barriers preventing families from accessing available options in their community. Adjustments to state-funded public preschool programs address some of these challenges. The Preschool-Aged At-Risk program provides state school finance formula funding for students who meet certain eligibility criteria and who are enrolled approved programs that meet state requirements. Beginning in school year 2021-22, funding expanded to include eligible three-year-old students, in addition to eligible four-year-old students.

The Kansas State Department of Education also administers the Kansas Preschool Pilot grant program, using funding from the Children’s Initiative Fund (CIF) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Section 2.2.2 describes work to align Kansas Preschool Pilot program requirements and application processes with the Early Childhood Block Grant. At least 50% of preschool children served with grant funding must meet program eligibility criteria. School districts applying for grant funds use the Preschool Revenue Calculator and Budget Template tool to demonstrate that they are reinvesting other available sources of funding (state enrollment aid and accompanying weightings, special education funds, Head Start funds) into their preschool programs before requesting grant funds to supplement gaps.

7.3.3 Subgrants for Kindergarten Readiness

Through PDG funding, the Kansas Children’s Cabinet requested grant applications, as part of the All in For Kansas Kids Quality Subgrants, from local early childhood providers and community partners. Specifically, grants were awarded to communities to coordinate planning, information sharing, and service delivery between early childhood settings and school districts. Projects involving joint workforce development and family engagement to enhance transitions were also funded. In 2021 thirteen communities were awarded grants from \$1,815 to \$25,000, for a total of \$256,755.

7.3.4 Sunflower Summer

[Sunflower Summer](#)⁷² was developed in 2021 as a summer enrichment program by Kansas State Department of Education, the Children’s Cabinet, and the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research. Statewide educational attractions (museums, parks, zoos, libraries) provide summer enrichment learning for families with students in Pre-K to 12th grade. Students in public, private, parochial, and home school settings are all eligible. Given the success of the inaugural program, and the identification for continued funding provided by the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund, Sunflower Summer will expand and continue in summers of 2022 and 2023.

- In 2021, participants represented families residing from all 105 Kansas counties, serving a total of 43,120 children and 28,108 adults.
- The Sunflower Summer mobile app tracked participation, facilitated entry at ticketed venues, and captured user demographic data. Families commented in person and via social media that the program introduced them to activities and topics they hadn’t previously tried, while venues noted that their summer visitors were coming from areas of the state they do not normally draw from.
- For 2022, more venues expressed a desire to participate, and new types of activities will be offered including day camps.

8 *How have PDG B-5 funds help enhance or improve data coordination and sharing in your state’s early care and education system?*

8.1 Establishing a Data Trust

In 2021, Kansas enacted a [Data Trust Agreement \(Data Trust\)](#)⁷³ outlining new data governance opportunities and structures [among four state agencies](#)⁷⁴ and the Children’s Cabinet, serving as the Data Trustee. The Data Trust reflects Kansas’ commitment to the future of our early childhood system and is our initial step toward – and the foundation of – an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) that enables partners statewide to look at our early childhood data in order to help us evaluate accountability, effectiveness, equitable access, and return on investment (ROI) of system and program investments. The Data Trust governing board is charged with the design of sustainable practices and tools for efficiently sharing early childhood data among members. The Data Trust will prioritize data projects that apply for, and are approved to be, “ECID authorized projects.” As the Data Trust grows, additional state and local partners will be added. The data governance board meets quarterly and helps 1) develop sustainable practices, 2) review/prioritize ECID authorized project plans and develop best practices for improving data use and data literacy.

8.2 Technical Plan and Proof of Concept Infrastructure

A major deliverable and emphasis in PDG B-5 goals is creating an unduplicated count report of children across the mixed-delivery system. A technical plan was created in 2021 and is now in its beginning phases of execution. As a part of the technical plan, there was an early childhood data systems and resources review across agencies, partners, and services. This was a key step in documenting and creating a system-wide map of where early childhood data lives, in what form and format, and where gaps in data exist. An interactive Wiki site was developed that houses all system and service information by agency, funding source, and program. This tool will be updated continuously for use case management and to create

efficiencies in integration efforts. The proof-of-concept infrastructure was also constructed and will provide a foundation for the unduplicated count and response to future use case requests.

8.3 Use Cases for ECIDS

There were multiple facilitated meetings with agency directors, program administrators and managers, and IT support staff to articulate and document integrated data priorities and requirements, all supported through PDG funding. This stakeholder engagement resulted in a slate of use cases to guide data governance and integrated data priorities. Each use case represents an immediate and future need of stakeholders to have accessible and useable data to inform programmatic decision making, policy alignment, strategies to enhance program reach and equitable access, and resource distribution. The process resulted in recognition of the ten highest priority use cases across partners and systems. This slate of use cases will allow the Early Childhood Data Trust Governance Board to prioritize and commit funding and resources to carrying out Authorized Projects. Time, cost, and other resource estimates were developed. State agency leaders will identify funding for each case according to priorities, available resources, and interest.

The first Data Trust Authorized Project/Use Case was initiated during 2021 and involved data integration between the Children’s Cabinet and the Department for Children and Families. Specifically, this project was designed to analyze six years of historical data on early childhood services funded by the Cabinet to determine whether those services prevented removals into foster care during that same period. The results of Phase 1 were presented in December 2021, to the Children’s Cabinet. The study showed that participation in any of the early childhood services funded by the Children’s Cabinet significantly reduced the odds of children being removed into foster care for any reason. The findings have implications for early childhood as a significant protective factor against maltreatment and cost avoidance/ROI. These findings were disseminated in the Children’s Cabinet’s 2021 Annual Report and have submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for potential publication.

9 How have PDG B-5 funds helped ongoing efforts to enhance and/or implement your state’s Program Performance Evaluation Plan?

PDG funds have been used to support staff time at the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research (CPPR) to oversee and coordinate evaluation of grant-funded activities. Since initial receipt of PDG funding, the Kansas program performance evaluation plan has focused on two main goals: (1) evaluate progress of early childhood care and education system-building activities, and (2) align data and evaluation efforts and utilize program performance evaluation findings to catalyze progress towards the goals in the *All in for Kansas Kids* Strategic Plan. Working towards these goals has been greatly facilitated by a dedicated, coordinated, and systematic approach to system-building efforts guided by the early childhood strategic plan.

9.1 System-Building Evaluation Support

All in for Kansas Kids has become much more than just a plan in the state. The Children’s Cabinet newsletter, the weekly early childhood system email update, early childhood system grants, and other communications are all branded with the *All in For Kansas Kids* name and logo. *All in For Kansas kids* has a prominent link in the header of the Children’s Cabinet website. However, *All in For Kansas Kids* goes beyond a name and logo. Early childhood leadership at the state consistently acknowledge and

communicate that federal funding is being utilized to work collaboratively across sectors to shape the state's direction for early childhood. This singular focus has provided a unique opportunity for program evaluators to regularly engage with leadership of the Children's Cabinet, the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel, the State Directors Team, and the Early Childhood Stakeholders group when it comes to decisions and processes around administrative data collection, analysis, and sharing. Throughout the year evaluation team members are readily available to help state leaders gather existing data, provide interpretation of available information, and present on progress of early childhood care and education system-building activities to all these key governance groups as well as other councils and advisory bodies that are recognized as part of the state's early childhood governance structure to help inform decision making.

This work is not done in a vacuum, however. Kansas has long been committed to data-driven decision-making in early childhood program development, and in the state, there are dedicated, experienced program evaluators conducting program evaluations of many of the programs in the state's mixed-delivery system. PDG-funded staff have fostered positive working relationships with these evaluators, work to support their efforts when needed, and seek opportunities to align data collection, analysis, and sharing opportunities. This has created important and meaningful efficiencies in evaluation efforts. For example, because the *All in For Kansas Kids* framework is widely recognized as the "lens" for system-building activities, it has provided an opportunity to align work and create efficiencies. Rather than invest in the development of a separate annual "PDG" report for Kansas, evaluators are often able to collaborate with others to integrate findings into existing efforts. For the last two years, for example, the *All in for Kansas Kids* framework has been used as the structure for the Children's Cabinet Annual Report. PDG evaluators don't produce this report but collaborate with staff responsible for communicating the Cabinet's progress to the Governor, legislators, early childhood advocates, and the public to ensure inclusion of information on progress of system-building activities.

9.2 Synergies with Policy Initiatives for Evaluation Support

Evaluation staff also search for synergies with programmatic and policy initiatives of early childhood programs, advisory councils, and policy leaders that will provide dual benefit: informing strategic decision-making while also measuring the state's progress implementing the strategic plan. For example, when state partners including the Kansas Children's Service League launched the reengineered early childhood Centralized Access Point (CAP), 1-800-CHILDREN, PDG evaluation staff worked with project stakeholders to develop measurement systems through utilization data. These helped the team to understand the effectiveness of 1-800-CHILDREN in meeting the needs of parents. Evaluation staff now have authorized access to system data and can assist with program reports while also evaluating the effectiveness of the CAP in meeting families' needs as envisioned in the *All in For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan*.

Another example is collaboration with the Kansas Coordinating Council on Early Childhood Developmental Services, more commonly known as the State Interagency Coordinating Council, or SICC. The SICC is responsible for advising and assisting the Kansas Governor and the legislature on matters that impact Kansas families with young children who have, or are at risk for, developmental delays. The SICC works closely with the state's 30 Local Interagency Coordinating Councils, that by state law are responsible for coordination of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Concerned about the impact of the pandemic on the availability and coordination of services and families' ability to "bridge gaps" in available services (one of the overarching concerns noted in the early childhood needs assessment is lack of resources for families to understand how to effectively bridge existing resource gaps), the SICC is evaluating ways to work with LICCs to enhance collaboration. The SICC has asked to work with the PDG evaluation team to evaluate coordination of early intervention programs in the state.

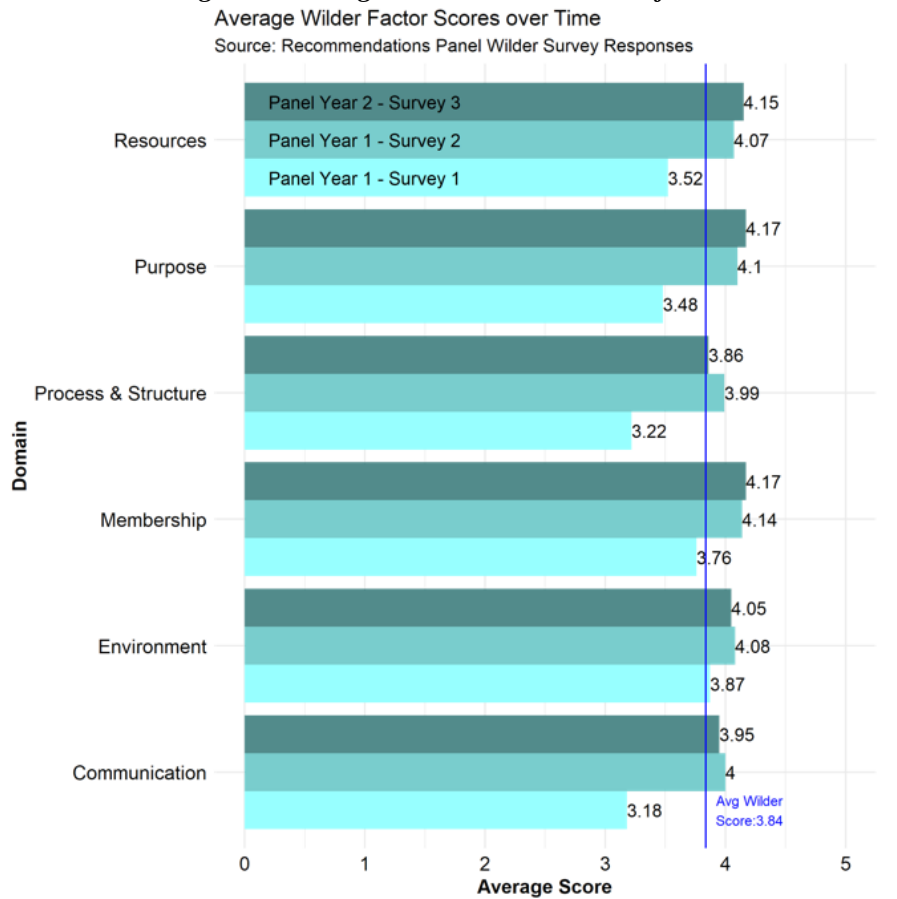
9.3 Evaluation of Collaboration among Programs in the Mixed-Delivery System

As part of a statewide Needs Assessment of the Kansas Early Intervention Program in 2019, CPPR staff conducted collaboration analyses using the [Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory](#)⁷⁵ and the [Levels of Collaboration Scale](#)⁷⁶ with most of the LICCs in the state. With this baseline information in hand, evaluators are working with the SICC and LICCs around the state to replicate that assessment and gather new data on collaboration among the state's LICCs. This will help identify strengths, barriers, and opportunities to enhance collaboration, and should be complete by the conclusion of the third year of PDG-funded efforts.

Collaboration analysis has been used in other ways as part of PDG evaluation efforts. Both the Wilder Inventory and Levels of Collaboration scale have been administered three times with the Early Childhood Recommendations Panel. As noted earlier the Panel was authorized by the Governor in February 2020 to serve in an advisory capacity to the Children's Cabinet, the state's Early Childhood Advisory Council, with annual appointment of members to one-year terms, with members eligible for reappointment subject to Cabinet approval. Project partners agreed assessing collaboration among members of the Panel over time would be one way to help understand if efforts to implement the early childhood strategic plan by building and growing partnerships between all state agencies and local providers (plan Goal 1) were working. The Wilder and Levels of Collaboration Scale were administered in June 2020 (at the launch of the initial Panel), May 2021 (with year one Panel membership nearing the end of the first-year term), and July 2021 (initial survey with year two Panel members). While there were inevitable changes in Panel members across the course of a year, there were minimal changes in membership in the first year, but about one-quarter of the Panel members changed between Year 1 and 2, with resignations and appointment of new members.

The Wilder Inventory was chosen because it is an evidence-based diagnostic tool that can be used across time and provides insight into factors shown to contribute to successful collaboration: purpose (clarity of shared vision and goals; belief in a unique purpose); environment (a positive political and economic environment; perceived legitimacy of the collaborative group); membership (respect and trust within the coalition; ability to compromise), process and structure (clarity of roles and responsibilities; clear decision-making processes), communication (openness and frequency; formal and informal relationships among members), and resources (skilled leadership; sufficient funds and staff). Scores across the three survey periods for the six domains is shown in [Error! Reference source not found.](#)

Figure 5: Average Wilder Factor Scores for EC Recommendations Panel



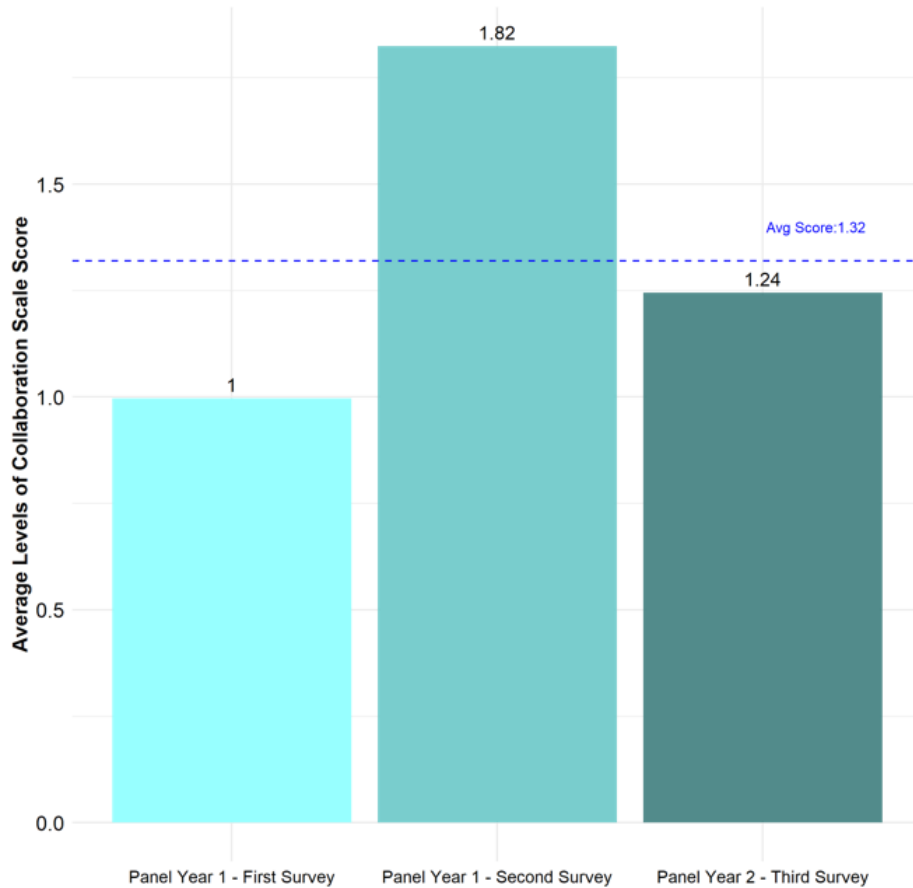
Results gathered to date suggest that, in part, efforts are working, with higher scores in all domains between the initial and end-of-year survey with the first year’s Panel cohort, and higher scores for the second year initial Panel survey, compared to the first year initial Panel survey. Across all three surveys there were relatively high scores in all domains, particularly membership and environment. Lower average scores in the initial survey the first year of the panel in domains such as purpose, process and structure, and communication likely were the result of uncertainty of the work of the Panel given it was an entirely new structure, and substantially higher scores by the end of the year indicated progress.

The Levels of Collaboration scale approaches the assessment of the collaboration at a more granular level, by examining the perceived intensity of working relationships between each unique member of the Panel. Every Panel member was asked to “score” their level of working relationship with others on the Panel using a five point scale where 1 is general awareness, loosely-defined roles, minimal communication, and exclusively independent decision-making, 2 represents somewhat defined roles, some formal communication, and all independent decision-making, 3 entails sharing of information and resources, more well-defined roles, frequent communication, and some shared decision-making, 4 means frequent and prioritized communication and equal participation in voting/decision-making, and 5 means belonging to one system, ongoing communication, and full consensus on all decisions.

Figure 6: Average Levels of Collaboration Score Scores for EC Recommendations Panel

Average Levels of Collaboration Scale Score over Time Periods

Source: Recommendations Panel Wilder Survey Responses



At the launch of the first Panel, levels of collaboration amongst all members had an average score of 1.0, meaning that on average relationships were based on loose “networking” with low levels of communication, loosely-defined formal roles between members, and no shared decision-making. By the end of the first year (Panel Year 1 – Second Survey), members were much more likely to indicate they were providing information to other members, to have established some formal channels of communication, and to have developed some definition in mutual roles (average score of 1.82). With turnover in about 25% of Panel membership at the end of Year 1, when membership of the Panel was surveyed (Panel Year 2 – Third Survey) the average score dropped considerably to 1.2. These findings led to a number of recommendations to Panel leadership, which included:

- During membership transitions, coordinate introductions between new members and existing members, particularly with organizations with a high number of existing connections,
- Coordinate introductions between new members and those that demonstrated a significant increase in connections (those members may have insights into mechanisms to increase collaboration with others), and
- Consider determining if there are “lessons to be learned” from those “highly mobile” members that showed an ability to increase connections with others over time.

Given the overarching importance of collaboration to the state's early childhood system (Goals 1 and 2 in the *All in for Kansas Kids* strategic plan focus on state-level and community-level coordination) ongoing assessment of the Kansas environment for collaboration will be of great interest and importance in terms of building connected systems that better help families "connect the dots" so they can find and access the services they need, when they need them.

10 Appendix

10.1 Endnotes

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 - ¹² <https://ks.childcareaware.org/cchc1/#:~:text=The%20Child%20Care%20Health%20Consultant,and%20whenever%20you%20need%20it.>
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