High-quality, affordable early childhood education (ECE) can help children prepare to be future leaders in our communities and in our state. Unfortunately, quality early childhood education is out of reach for many Kansas kids because of costs and missed opportunities for statewide collaboration. With increased federal funding, an ongoing pilot project, and a new governor who understands the importance of early childhood education, Kansas has three opportunities to maximize the effectiveness of these programs and the children they serve.

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is federal funding administered by states. It provides financial assistance for low-income families to attain quality child care programs, while allowing families to maintain employment or seek higher education. Child care assistance is decreasing at a faster rate than childhood poverty. From 2007 to 2017, the number of children receiving child care assistance in Kansas has decreased by more than 10,400 children, while the number of children living in poverty only decreased by 4,000 children. These funds are essential for providing affordable, child care programs to low-income families while allowing parents to maintain stable employment.

For many families, the cost of child care programs can be prohibitive. In Kansas, a family of three making more than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, or $39,461 a year, would not qualify for child care assistance. However, the average annual cost of child care in the Topeka metro area is $8,442, or roughly 20 percent of the annual income of a family just above the 185 percent threshold. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, child care is “affordable” when it comprises of “no more than 7 percent of a family’s income.”

For fiscal year (FY) 2018, Congress increased funding for CCDBG to $8.1 billion, an increase from FY 2017’s appropriation of $5.8 billion. While this increase is a positive step, more remains to be done to make child care programs high-quality and affordable.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

» Match all federal funds for child care. In FY 2016, Kansas was one of four states that did not provide enough state matching funds to draw down all federal matching funds, losing $4 million in federal dollars, or 24 percent of its federal matching funds. Kansas policymakers must ensure that our state meets the requirements needed to access and use all federal funding to which the state is entitled, including spending the necessary matching amount of state funds on early childhood education.

» Use Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for early childhood education. In 2016, while half of the states (26) transferred TANF funds to Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Kansas transferred none. States can “transfer up to 30 percent of TANF funding to CCDF and can spend an unlimited amount of TANF funding directly to help low-income families cover child care expenses.”

» Increase child care assistance reimbursement rate. This year, Kansas will increase the child care assistance reimbursement rate to cover 65 percent of the market rate for child care. This increase is a step in the right direction to secure high-quality child care for low-income families. The increased reimbursement will likely lead to more providers accepting child care subsidies, increasing both access to and affordability of child care. Kansas can build on this momentum in two ways:
  • Establishing rates by county, not as a reflection of statewide averages, to account for regional differences; and
  • Setting rates at the federally recommended 75th percentile of the most recent market rate survey to ensure parent choice.

» Use CCDBG funds to make early childhood education more affordable. Kansas could increase eligibility for child care assistance. Serving all currently served children (12,400) at the 75th percentile of the current market rate would cost an additional $43 million.

affordable for Kansas families. While child care assistance is available for Kansas families using CCDBG funding, not every eligible family receives assistance. Between 2012–2016, the average monthly number of children eligible under Kansas eligibility rules was 122,006. However, in 2016, the average monthly number of Kansas children receiving child care assistance was 11,214, or only 9 percent of eligible children.

Research shows that policies that make high-quality child care more affordable help families meet essential needs and build savings creating economic security: “Single mothers of young children who received help paying for child care were 39 percent more likely to still be employed after two years than single mothers of young children who did not receive any help paying for child care.”

Changes were made to CCDBG through the bipartisan CCDBG Reauthorization Act of 2014. Without immediate resources to fund the requirements of the law, many states, including Kansas, have taken multiple years to come fully into compliance with its provisions.

With the subsequent increase in CCDBG funding, Kansas “is using the additional federal child care funds to fully implement the requirements under the CCDBG reauthorization law and regulations.” Kansas also used the additional funds to increase the payment rates for providers from “the 40th percentile of 2014 market rates (for each county group) to the 65th percentile of 2017 market rates.” The increase could help encourage child care providers to accept children receiving child care assistance. Currently, 15 percent of counties do not have children receiving child care assistance despite potential eligibility.

Single mothers of young children who received help paying for child care were 39 percent more likely to still be employed after two years.
Early childhood education providers want to provide a safe, nurturing place for the children they serve. With the importance of ECE on future outcomes, providers have a huge role to play in the development of our future leaders. Research shows there is a marked difference between ECE programs. Programs such as the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) can help ECE providers increase the quality and effectiveness of their programs. These are “systems for rating the quality of child care and child education providers. In some states, providers must participate in a rating system to be eligible for subsidies or other forms of support available through federal programs such as CCDF or TANF. In other states, provider participation is voluntary.” In 2016, 38 states included licensed center-based ECE programs and 36 states included licensed family child care in their QRIS.

These systems serve as a parent resource and “as a strategy to create incentives for continued quality improvement.” Well-crafted QRIS, which work with ECE providers to raise standards and increase quality, will bolster educational, economic, and health outcomes for the children they serve, and help parents make more informed choices as consumers. As Kansas is currently completing the first year of a three-year pilot for its QRIS, policymakers must use this opportunity to maximize the efficiency of the system to benefit families and providers. Fortunately, with the increase in CCDBG funding, along with the reauthorization, there are increased quality funds set aside to be used for this purpose.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **The Kansas QRIS must include licensing, for both center- and family-based ECE programs, as a prerequisite for participation.**
  To ensure quality, licensing is needed as it helps “integrate the QRIS into the ECE system and ensures program quality for all children.”

- **Use the QRIS to understand needs.**
  The QRIS must work with ECE providers and families to understand their needs and concerns and create a QRIS that reflects these conversations. For example, states “can harness the power of workforce registries … [to] get a clearer picture of their early childhood workforce and pursue policy interventions that would increase compensation and support the current needs of the workforce.”

- **Create a tiered reimbursement system based on QRIS ratings.**
  Twelve states are using the increased CCDBG funds to incentivize provider participation in the QRIS. For some states, that includes creating or increasing tiered payment rates based on a provider’s rating. For example, Iowa plans to “increase its tiered payment rates for providers at level five of the state’s quality rating and improvement system (which has five levels) from the 75th percentile of 2014 market rates to the 75th percentile of 2017 market rates, and to introduce two new tiered rate levels for providers at quality levels one through four (which previously received the base rate), as of January 2019.” Kansas does not have a ratings component of its QRIS pilot project. As we implement our system, we can consider how to use a ratings tool to reward high-quality providers.
Flow of Federal Early Childhood Funds: Kansas

**KEY:** → Funding mandated for State Departments of Education  ❌ Funding provided directly to local organizations  ○ State does not receive funding

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**Office of the Governor**

**Department of Health and Human Services**
- Office of Head Start
  - Office of Child Care
    - CCDF
  - PDS
- Office of Family Assistance
  - TANF

**Department of Agriculture**
- Office of Family and Rehabilitation Services
  - Food & Nutrition Service
    - CACFP

**Department of Education**
- Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
  - Part B, Section 619
  - Part C
- Office of Postsecondary Education
  - CCAMPIS

**Department for Children and Families, Economic & Employment Services, Child Care and Early Education**
- Child Care Subsidy
  - CCDF
- Links to Quality - Quality Rating Improvement System
  - CCDF
- Children's Cabinet
  - SAC is no longer extant - ended in 2014
- Head Start Collaboration Office
- Successful Families Program
  - TANF

**Local Institutions**

**Kansas**

**Quality Rating Improvement System (QRES)**
The state’s QRIS is being piloted.

Recently, Kansas was ranked 48th based on its integration of ECE state programs. The analysis for Kansas’ low ranking, completed by the Bipartisan Policy Center, found the state has many opportunities to streamline processes, which can increase program and cost efficiency. With different streams of funding, from federal and state sources, there are accompanying rules and requirements. When ECE programs are overseen by fewer agencies, it is easier to increase efficiency. Creating one state agency “charged with supporting children from birth to kindergarten would help streamline decision-making, eliminate inefficiencies, and ensure that all state systems are coordinated and aligned to the same goals.”

In addition, sharing data such as income across programs can make access easier by streamlining the application process. Georgia and Mississippi are the only two states with the capacity “to link data across six major ECE programs.” Currently, only 11 states report linking ECE data with social services data. Kansas should create a system that “assigns each child a unique identifier number at birth or when the child enters the state’s ECE system. The number would remain with the child over time and across programs or services and key databases, allowing the state to track each child’s progress over time and reduce redundant paperwork requirements for children who participate in multiple programs.”

» Establish a state advisory council.
Kansas is one of five states that does not have a state advisory council (SAC), which is required by law. Kansas had a SAC up until 2014, when it was dismantled. By reinstating the SAC, the council can work to conduct “a statewide needs assessment on the quality and availability of ECE programs.” This needs assessment should include conducting “hearings and focus groups with families to identify barriers to services.” Finally, a SAC can act in a facilitator role as state agencies engage in policy conversations.
6 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates · Public Use Microdata Sample. Dates: 2012-2016. The variables used were—age (ages 0 through 12),
5 Bipartisan Policy Center. “Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System to Support Children and Families: A State-by-State
2 2 Kids Count Data Center.
1 Child Care Aware of Kansas. “Who Cares for Kansas Children? 2018 Kansas Child Care Workforce Study and State Child Care Profile.” September
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1 Child Care Aware of Kansas. “Who Cares for Kansas Children? 2018 Kansas Child Care Workforce Study and State Child Care Profile.” September
10 Johnson-Staub, Christine and Shiva Sethi. “From Opportunity to Change: State Experiences Implementing CCDBG.” The Center for Law and Social
6 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates · Public Use Microdata Sample. Dates: 2012-2016. The variables used were—age (ages 0 through 12),
5 Bipartisan Policy Center. “Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System to Support Children and Families: A State-by-State
2 2 Kids Count Data Center.
1 Child Care Aware of Kansas. “Who Cares for Kansas Children? 2018 Kansas Child Care Workforce Study and State Child Care Profile.” September


28 The three agencies are the Department of Child and Families, the Department of Health and Environment, and the Department of Education.

29 According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, 31 states and the District of Columbia have at least three state agencies that are involved in administering ECE funding.


36 Other states without a state advisory council include Florida, Idaho, South Dakota, and Texas.

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