

PROJECT THRIVE



Linking Policies for Child Health,
Early Learning, and Family Support

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Project THRIVE *Short Takes* highlight topics of interest and importance to state maternal and child health leaders and their partners building State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS). Each *Short Take* summarizes the issue, relevant research, and related resources.

Project THRIVE is a public policy analysis and education initiative for infants and young children at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) funded through a cooperative agreement with the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) uses research to inform policy and practice that promote the economic security, health, and well-being of America's low-income families and children.

SHORT TAKE NO. 6

Local Systems Development

The Issue

State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grants are designed to provide state Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Agencies and their partner organizations with small amounts of funding as an incentive for strengthening systems of care for young children and their families. States are encouraged to plan, develop, and ultimately implement collaborations and partnerships that support families and communities in the development of children who are healthy and ready to learn at school entry. But, to make a difference, integrated service strategies must work at the local level, on the ground where families live and providers practice. Therefore supporting local systems is a key strategy for ECCS grantees.

Project THRIVE reviewed state ECCS plans and proposals for evidence of local systems development, and collected additional information from selected states. In our scan, we found that 38 states are developing local systems to build their Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems and to improve outcomes for children and families (see Project THRIVE Short Take No. 5, *State of the States' ECCS Initiatives*). This Short Take highlights the efforts of 10 states and illustrates various approaches for state-to-local support for developing early childhood systems.

State-to-Local Support of Early Childhood Systems

State approaches to support local systems development vary. The role of ECCS in these initiatives also varies. Types of state-to-local support generally can be distinguished by differences in the scope and mode of state support for local systems development. The scope of some efforts is statewide, while other states target their support to only specific counties or communities. For example, communities may qualify on the basis of population risks, size, or unmet need for services. Included in this set are states that are currently funding pilot projects in some regions.

States use different strategies, alone or in combination, to support local communities. These include direct funding to communities; policy, regulation, or guidance; and direct (“hands on”) and indirect technical support (such as offering tools). Each strategy has its strengths and weaknesses and meets different needs. Direct state funding for local systems development is one obvious means of support; however, many states do not have sufficient

Table 1. Scope and Strategies of State-to-Local Approach

Scope and mode of approach	AZ	CO	IA	IL	MA	MI	OH	OK	VT	WA
Statewide	✓	*	✓				✓		✓	
Targeted jurisdictions		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Direct funding	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	*	
Policy, regulation, or guidance	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Direct technical assistance	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Technical assistance tools	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

*Indicates state is building toward this approach.

resources to fund new local efforts. Even among those with special local funding, most states combine funding with another type of support. Many states—particularly those with a tradition of local county control—are providing various levels of technical assistance to communities, ranging from training local community leaders to providing planning tools. A combination of these modes may best fit the state context. Often, states use a mix of state-level and community-directed approaches—the so-called “grassroots and grasstops” strategy. Table 1 provides a summary of the approaches used by the 10 states described below.

Statewide Approaches

Arizona

Arizona passed the **First Things First** ballot initiative (Proposition 203) in November 2006, with the help of a broad-based coalition of Arizonians. Funding for the initiative will be provided by a tobacco tax (estimated at \$150 million per year). The law requires that 90 percent of funds be used for community programs. The aim is to ensure that all families and children have voluntary access to high-quality early learning and health screenings that will provide the foundations for future success. A nine-member, state-level Early Childhood Development and Health Board is charged with allocating the funds to address unmet needs for children ages birth to 5. First Things First sets seven goals and establishes geographic regions, each represented by 11-member councils that will plan for services and distribute funding at the local level. The regional grants will be tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of the communities the region

serves, with a focus on demonstrating how improved outcomes around the six goals will be attained given the challenges the region faces. (See box.) The local funding formula reflects the distribution of the population of children birth to age 5 and the number of these children living in families with income up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level. But big change takes time. The Early Childhood Development and Health Board that will administer the fund was named in December 2006, regional designations are due at the end of 2007, and the schedule calls for appointment of regional directors by April 2008.

Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board Goals

- Improve the quality of early childhood development and health programs.
- Increase access to quality early childhood development and health programs.
- Increase access to preventive health care and health screenings for children through age 5.
- Offer parent and family support and education concerning early child development and health providers.
- Provide professional development and training for early childhood development and health providers.
- Increase coordination of early childhood development and health programs.
- Increase public information about the importance of early childhood development and health.

Direct state funding for local systems development is one obvious means of support; however, many states do not have sufficient resources to fund new local efforts. Even among those with special local funding, most states combine funding with another type of support.

Iowa

Iowa Community Empowerment was created in 1998 by the legislature to support a partnership between communities and state government to improve the well-being of families with young children ages birth to 5. Iowa's 99 counties are organized into 58 Community Empowerment Areas (CEA). Each area has a local Community Empowerment Board for collaboration, oversight, and system redesign. The boards include citizens, elected officials, business leaders, consumers, faith representatives, service providers, and others. They are charged to assess the needs in their community, develop and implement plans, and evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Based on community priorities, each local board determines how funds will be used to meet the needs of young children and their families, with emphasis on quality services. Accountability measures are in place in every community in Iowa to demonstrate the capacity and commitment for achieving the following results: healthy children, children ready to succeed in school, safe and supportive communities, secure and nurturing families, and secure and nurturing child care environments. Specific measures cover health, development, and early care and learning program performance. TANF funds are used for community grants to enhance child care, and state general fund dollars are used for School Ready grants to support comprehensive service systems. Funds are distributed in a formula based on service populations, and more than \$7 million is being spent per year. The Iowa Empowerment Board directs this effort and makes recommendations to the legislature, supported by the State Empowerment Team—an interagency group representing six departments.

Ohio

Ohio has a long history of projects and initiatives focused on improving the well-being and school readiness of young children. The state's **Family and Children**

First Councils, which address an array of children's issues, have become a valuable source of support for early childhood systems and services. They operate in every county and at the state Cabinet level to foster planning and dialogue among key policymakers. Local integration of services such as home visiting and early intervention has been implemented statewide. Ohio's interagency systems development efforts also have included a strong focus on early childhood mental health. Currently, the state's ECCS and three other large initiatives are working toward better integration of and quality in early childhood services, as well as further development and better coordination of the early childhood system.

Vermont

Vermont's **Building Bright Futures** (BBF) supports the creation of a unified, sustainable system of early care, health, and education for young children and their families, building on a long series of early childhood initiatives. Created through Executive Order by Governor Jim Douglas, BBF is guided by a public-private Governing Council. ECCS and BBF are working together to create a statewide comprehensive plan for early care, health, and education. Work on governance and structures led to the establishment of 12 BBF Regional Councils for community-level systems building, which are based on the existing local Early Childhood Councils in each of Vermont's regions. BBF Regional Directors have been hired in each region and are mandated to expand the BBF councils where necessary to include additional partners and stakeholders. Each Regional Council brings together parents, providers, employers, and others at the community level to: (1) support creation of an integrated early childhood system; (2) develop a regional plan; (3) advise the state BBF Governing Council; and (4) monitor child and family outcomes. A state-level Regional Councils Network will bring together representatives from each region. BBF, ECCS, and other state agency staff are providing technical assistance

to the Regional Councils to develop early childhood systems plans using a results-based accountability approach. Community planning efforts will be supported by state technical assistance and resources from ECCS; however, at this point the BBF funding given to local communities primarily supports administration and the regional BBF staff.

Targeted Approaches

Initially Targeted, Growing to Statewide, with Funding

Colorado

In Colorado, local early childhood councils were originally established as pilots in 1997, and expanded in 1999, to design and implement integrated models of children's services in local communities. The legislation included the ability for early childhood councils to apply for waivers of rules or regulations that may obstruct innovative ways to improve and expand services. Legislation adopted during the 2007 session further expanded the number of early childhood councils from 17 to 31, representing 90 percent of Colorado's counties. The authorizing legislation instructs these local councils to increase and sustain the quality, accessibility, capacity, and affordability of comprehensive early childhood services through collaboration among public and private stakeholders. The 2007 legislation also provided for an advisory council appointed and staffed by the Office of the Lieutenant Governor to work in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Human Services to support the activities of the councils, including: (1) developing applications and criteria for the creation of new local early childhood councils and for funding councils; (2) reviewing requests for waivers; (3) advising on the development and implementation of an independent statewide evaluation of the councils system; and (4) advising on the development and implementation of technical assistance to councils. **Smart Start Colorado** (SSC) provides linkages, alignment, and support between state and local early childhood systems building work. Local early childhood council coordinators attend a monthly meeting at which SSC is a resource partner and council coordinator representatives sit on the Early Childhood State Systems Team, as well as SSC taskforces. Smart Start Colorado also provides support and technical assistance to local councils through the newly designed web-based Systems Building Toolkit, the

Community Assessment Toolkit, and piloted technical assistance support to local councils.

Targeted Areas, with Funding

Illinois

Collaboration through the state's Birth to Five Project, of which ECCS is a part, has led to development of a community-level systems development initiative in Illinois. The **All Our Kids (AOK) Early Childhood Networks** are a joint effort between the Illinois Department of Human Services, 10 Illinois Health Departments, family members, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and other local agencies serving very young children and their families. Beginning in 2000 in 12 pilot communities, this project is designed to create coordinated local systems that can help families receive the services they need. Local public health departments are the fiscal agents and employ an AOK Network Coordinator, as well as provide oversight and local leadership. The AOK Networks identify gaps and barriers to providing coordinated services locally and refer them to the state-level Systems Coordination Committee and the Government Interagency Team. The networks are strengthening relationships with local school systems, child welfare units, and others. (See box.) Local outreach efforts assist in implementing the All Kids policy to assure universal health coverage for children. At the state-level, the Systems Coordination Committee of the

What do Illinois' AOK Networks Do?

- Assess the needs of very young children (younger than 5 years) and their families.
- Link children and their families to appropriate services.
- Assist service providers in working together to close the gaps in services.
- Inform others in the community about the needs of very young children and their families.
- Explore the training needs of people who work with very young children and their families.
- Evaluate the "systems" of services to find out if families have difficulties using the services and if these services meet the needs of young children and their families.
- Provide leadership for policy development to assure the health of very young children and their families.

Birth to Five Project, in conjunction with state agency leaders, provides general oversight of AOK. In 2006, the Illinois General Assembly adopted an expansion of the Early Childhood Block Grant to fund an early childhood education Pre-K initiative serving all 3- and 4-year olds and simultaneously created a set-aside that puts 11 cents of every preschool dollar towards providing services for at-risk infants and toddlers. Based on the recommendations of the Illinois Early Learning Council and proposals from Governor Blagojevich, the measure immediately adds \$45 million in birth-to-five funding to the state budget, and includes additional, phased-in community-level expansions over a five-year period.

Michigan

In Michigan, the **Great Start System Blueprint** (ECCS plan) was accepted by the Governor's Children's Cabinet with two overarching priorities: (1) creation of a public-private entity to oversee implementation (the Early Childhood Investment Corporation—ECIC); and (2) development of local early childhood systems. The primary approach for implementation is through local Great Start Collaboratives (GSC). With funding from the federal Child Care and Development Fund, Michigan School Aid Fund, and the Kellogg Foundation, the ECIC issued a request for proposal (RFP) for GSCs in October of 2005. Some 21 local Great Start Collaboratives have been established, with funding and staff. Intermediate School Districts serve as the fiduciary agent and convener of individual collaboratives. Each GSC prepares a multi-year strategic plan for local early childhood systems development and an annual local "Early Childhood Action Agenda." The GSCs use a results-based accountability framework to conduct local systems reviews and produce report cards about the status of young children and families in the community. Each GSC is required to include local parents in their leadership and planning efforts. In August 2006, Governor Granholm signed a state budget approved by the legislature that included: (1) \$1 million for the GSC; (2) approximately \$1.6 million in new funding for the Great Parents-Great Start parent information and education grants to expand high-quality early childhood services; (3) a \$1.5 million increase in funding through the Michigan Department of Education to the 0-3 Secondary Prevention for community programs to prevent the maltreatment of very young children; and (4) \$400,000

Highlights of Michigan's Great Start Collaboratives

- Commit to establishing and maintaining a comprehensive early childhood system.
- Assure alignment between and collaboration among all early childhood initiatives and programs in the community.
- Establish policies and procedures that facilitate access, interface, and coordination of services for young children and their families.
- Maintain effective, collaborative governance structures (sufficient authority, within their respective organizations, to commit resources to the local system).
- Feature active and engaged members.
- Have sufficient staff to carry out their strategic plans.
- Conduct local early childhood system assessment and planning using a continuous quality improvement process.
- Use community input to guide their assessment and planning (such as surveys, public forums, and parent engagement).
- Implement the local portion of the statewide Great Start system public education campaign.
- Communicate and share information with the early childhood community.

Source: Great Start System. (2005). *Performance measures for Great Start Collaboration community assessment and planning*. Accessed August 20, 2007 at <www.greatstartforkids.org/background.htm>

for an expansion of the Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma currently funds 18 **Oklahoma Smart Start** communities with state appropriated dollars and technical assistance staff to strengthen local early childhood systems. The ECCS grant and private contributions have provided some expansion funds to aid communities in recent years. These are communities with high unmet needs that received awards based on successful applications in a competitive process. The local work includes convening all stakeholders, tracking data at the local level, conducting a needs assessment, developing a strategic plan, and seeking collaborative solutions to unmet needs. Support is provided in the form of training, resources, and materials from the Community Planners of the Smart Start Oklahoma office, as well as technical assistance

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from several other agencies, universities, and organizations. This work includes a dual focus on state level policy and community engagement and action. Parent involvement and participatory action research are integral to the state’s community approach.

Targeted Areas, without Additional Funding

Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (MECCS) team created a leadership pilot project, in addition to its state-level planning and interagency work. The pilot’s collaborating agencies (MECCS, Children’s Trust Fund, and United Way of Massachusetts Bay) set up three leadership teams of five members each, with family members, program directors, and the collaborating agencies represented to focus on strengthening family support and family engagement. The teams received training in the leadership approach of Cornell’s Family Development Credential and aimed to infuse the family development approach into local systems change efforts. During the two-year pilot, challenges included adapting the curriculum; engaging family members; the major reorganization of one agency; differing goals across the teams and among funding partners; and the evolutionary nature of change. MECCS also had successes, including the powerful bonds built across the teams and the reinforcement of the family development concept. Each of these pilot teams has been able to secure operating funds from United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley (UWMBMV), based on a performance measure related to the work they undertook in the pilot. In addition, the Cambridge team has secured a \$200,000 grant from the Cambridge City Council. These three projects will also have the opportunity to apply for additional funding from the UWMBMV in the coming year, through an RFP that was informed by the pilot. The future will bring new developments. In June 2007, Massachusetts Governor

Deval Patrick signed a budget creating the Readiness Project, which appropriates funds to develop a 10-year strategic plan addressing education needs from prekindergarten to college. The Readiness Project—advised by a group of educators, legislators, community leaders, and business leaders—is expected to strongly influence early childhood systems development at the state and local levels in Massachusetts. The leadership team will work to ensure that the plan includes a strong focus on family support and family engagement.

Washington

Washington State primarily focused on the state level in the early years of ECCS planning, but is now developing their Kids Matter framework and plan. In the past year, however, the Kids Matter implementation work began to focus on local-level, community efforts. Under the title “**Building Connections**,” approaches are intended to: (1) increase awareness of the Kids Matter framework; (2) connect to existing community planning efforts (for example, Born Learning, Strengthening Families); and (3) develop a network of “Communities in Practice” for shared learning. Resources and tools are being developed for communities to use the Kids Matter framework for their local planning efforts, business plans, grant proposals, and other strategies. Technical assistance has also been made available to more than 10 counties through the Kids Matter-Build Initiative. Through local efforts and initiatives in partnership with the Foundation for Early Learning and Kids Matter, monthly community mobilization conference calls now occur. For 2008, plans are to expand these focused efforts and coordinate with the new Washington State Department of Early Learning, Thrive by Five, and other early childhood initiatives to support local community mobilization and public-private partnerships.

Conclusion

The Project THRIVE review of local systems development in state ECCS initiatives can be summed up in six key points.

- **Succeeding in early childhood systems development requires state-to-local support.** Local systems development is critical because that's where families live and providers deliver services. Ultimately, the "system" is what happens on the ground, at the local level. If local systems are not in place, state ECCS initiatives will not achieve their goals for improving children's health, education, and well-being.
- **Funding to local communities is helpful, but not necessary.** State support for local systems development comes in many forms and does not require an extensive financial investment. While some ECCS initiatives have worked with partners to secure funding, other states have only provided technical assistance or guidance to communities, for no direct financial cost. Each of these strategies has worked.
- **Local flexibility is important.** State and local strategies should be in sync, and improving the alignment of state policies to local systems is one of the key functions of ECCS. But local communities must be allowed the flexibility and creativity they need to function in their particular circumstances. When all directives are top-down, it is not truly a local system.
- **A statewide focus is not essential.** It is not necessary for local systems to be implemented statewide: different communities can be targeted in different ways, and some communities may require more local systems assistance than others. In a limited resource situation, targeting particular communities with high needs for intensive support may ultimately develop stronger local systems and lead to better outcomes for families than providing minimal statewide support.
- **State oversight can help assure quality and consistency of services for families.** While local autonomy and flexibility are highly valued, having a statewide plan, an oversight board/entity, and engaging both the executive branch and legislative leadership are important keys to success. The overarching state leadership can assure that policies enable local community efforts, funds are available to finance programs, and families have equitable access to needed services.
- **Results accountability and performance monitoring are particularly important in supporting local systems.** States are thinking about how their state-level goals, outcome indicators, and performance measures fit with local systems development. Some (such as Michigan and Vermont) are aligning their state and local results accountability efforts. Such efforts could be much more widely used to focus early childhood systems on changing outcomes for children and their families.

