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# State-level governance for early childhood programs in Minnesota

Governor's Children's Cabinet  
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# Executive Summary

Management Analysis and Development compiled this report on state-level governance of early childhood development, care, and learning programs in response to a 2021 requirement from the Minnesota legislature. MAD reviewed studies of early childhood governance, researched approaches in other states, and spoke to several prominent national experts, officials in Minnesota and elsewhere, and more than 100 community stakeholders and early childhood advocates. With a timeline that allowed only a few months for research, MAD was limited in the level of engagement and the number of interviews feasible for this report.

MAD found no consensus about the best governance approach to early childhood programs from the sources consulted, neither the reference research and national experts nor the community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and state officials in Minnesota. MAD learned that consolidation opens up possibilities for improved coordination, collaboration, and effective management. But MAD determined there is no one correct early childhood governance structure, and the choice of governance model cannot ensure improvements for programs and systems. For this reason, MAD offers no recommendations for which model of governance Minnesota should use. MAD concludes that more time, engagement, and interviews would not likely have led to clearer guidance at this point on early childhood governance choices.

## Minnesota's coordinated early childhood governance

Governance is the organizational structure that states use to establish and place authority and accountability for decisions about programs, policy, management, financing, and implementation. The governance approaches that states use for early childhood programs fall into three general categories, although the specifics differ:

- Consolidation into a free-standing agency, often dedicated solely to early childhood
- Consolidation into an existing state agency with a broader mandate than early childhood alone
- Coordination of early childhood programs offered through more than one state agency

Nationwide as of July 2021, 29 states used a coordinated approach, 8 had freestanding agencies dedicated to early childhood, and 13 plus the District of Columbia consolidated programs in an agency with a broader focus. However, several more states are in the process now of transitioning from coordinated to consolidated models.

Minnesota currently uses the coordinated approach, with early childhood programs spread primarily but not exclusively across the Departments of Education (MDE), Health (MDH), and Human Services (DHS). Coordination efforts related to early childhood and the state's whole family approach simultaneously examine the opportunities and needs of both children and the adults in their lives. Minnesota lacks the formal office that some states use to advance coordination across agencies, instead depending in part upon the Governor's Children's Cabinet for this. The cabinet has played a key role in a variety of interagency initiatives. In addition, federal funding for Minnesota's Preschool Development Grant (PDG) has prompted progress on coordination.

Shortcomings with Minnesota's early childhood programs and systems are well-documented, including in a 2018 evaluation report from Minnesota's Office of the Legislative Auditor. For more than 25 years, Minnesota has explored governance changes as a way to address shortcomings, including establishment for a time of a consolidated Department of Children, Families, and Learning and a coordinating Office of Early Learning. Most

recently, Rep. Dave Pinto, Chair of House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee, introduced legislation in 2021 to create a new department of early childhood and consolidate programs from MDE, MDH, and DHS.

## Possible early childhood governance options for the state

MAD drew upon its research for this report to offer the following list of options and potential approaches for consideration. The ideas listed are neither all-inclusive nor mutually exclusive.

- Continue to coordinate across agencies but with the staff, funding, and authority necessary for progress beyond the level of coordination that had been occurring prior to recent and positive developments.
- Increase Children’s Cabinet funding and expand its role in cross-agency coordination and alignment.
- Identify key priorities to address for the state-level early childhood system, analyze whether a change in governance will significantly affect them, and, if so, decide what form of governance would work best.
- Create an office within state government charged with coordinating early childhood programs and the early childhood system across state agencies.
- Ensure early childhood policy and programs are consolidated within each of the three key departments, perhaps under assistant commissioners or with coordination assigned to assistant commissioners.
- Commit to consolidation of early childhood programs and policy, define the scope for the age range and program areas, and engage in planning to increase support and lay a foundation for this change.
- Mandate consolidation now and work through potential missteps and adjustments later as they arise.

## Consolidation of state-level early childhood governance

Since the early 2000s, a significant number of states have moved toward consolidation of early childhood programs and away from the traditional approach of coordination across different agencies. National experts on governance cite several factors for this trend, including interest in holistic approaches to programs and systems, greater attention to the critical importance of early childhood, support from advocates for dedicated state agencies, and increased federal and state funding that has made this area of programming more significant.

### What Minnesota needs for successful consolidation of programs

The legislature asked for information about how early childhood programs could be consolidated. For this, MAD collected ideas about what needs to happen or be true for successful consolidation. The following points are suggested steps or considerations, although not all may be possible depending on timing and capacity.

**Determine purpose and priorities first, not the governance approach.** Settle on purpose and a few key issues, lay out measures that will affect them, and then determine whether governance will likely be a solution.

**Build on what’s been done.** The state should not lose the recent and marked improvements made through strengthened relationships, streamlined processes, better data sharing, and other efforts.

**Engage the wide range of those involved in early childhood, both early in the process and throughout.** Multiple perspectives are useful for complex decision-making, and broad partnerships build support for change.

**Link governance changes to more resources for early childhood.** Some worry state leaders will focus on governance and avoid increasing the funding that many say is needed to expand access and improve quality.

**Secure support from government leaders.** Dedicated leadership is critical to success for any governance change.

**Identify the appropriate scope for both age range and programming.** What Minnesota consolidates into a new early childhood department or division will depend on how early childhood is defined.

**Dedicate staff time to the consolidation effort.** The experience other states have had consolidating early childhood programs indicates the importance of dedicated staff time to carry out planning and implementation.

**Plan for the consolidation.** Involve state staff and leadership, providers, and community members. Ensure planning incorporates the diversity of those served through early childhood programs. Consider strategic planning and transition planning.

**Map administrative and practical requirements.** Consolidation will require strategies for operations, staffing shifts, administrative constraints, and impacts on funding streams and business systems.

**Determine authority for restructuring programs and agencies.** Identify needed shifts and establish where the authority lies to make them.

**Address IT issues and data sharing challenges.** Data experts at DHS and MDE said that, while doable, consolidation would require extensive work to ensure data can follow programs into a new agency.

**Designate a convener within state government.** Because no state consolidates all programs serving families and young children, officials in other states cited the need for a convener across agencies, even with consolidation.

**Involve the state agencies.** The departments that currently house early childhood programs have deep knowledge and experience with this policy area and with the administrative ins and outs of service delivery.

**Consider impacts on local service delivery.** The state and its local partners should identify potential impacts from a change in governance on counties, school districts, tribal governments, child care providers, and others—particularly important because Minnesota depends on counties and other local entities to administer services.

**Take time and weigh timing.** There is a tension between the urgency to move forward fast with a change in governance to improve results and the amount of time needed to successfully execute the change.

**Communicate.** Success with consolidation involves clear, consistent, and coordinated communication.

**Manage the organizational change.** The state will need to engage in change management to minimize disruptions and manage expectations.

**Hire an excellent manager at the top.** The first leader of a consolidated department or division should be skilled at integrating programs from different areas of government and people from different work cultures.

## **Motivations and suggested potential benefits for a consolidated approach**

The studies, interviews, and discussion sessions used for this report led to the following lists of potential benefits and reasons that states—Minnesota included—consider consolidating early childhood programs into new dedicated agencies or existing state departments. The list presents a full range of ideas from those sources. Some tie more directly to state-level governance than others.

### **Reasons for state-level consolidation cited in the research and by the national experts consulted**

- Advance coordination of goals, approaches, and resources.
- Create opportunities for better alignment and integration.
- Increase efficiency for the operations and service delivery that have been fragmented across agencies.
- Improve quality and make it more consistent across the range of early childhood programs and services.
- Establish senior-level leadership positions focused on early childhood and with influence and authority.
- Elevate the visibility of early childhood and raise its profile with policy makers and the public.
- Make it easier to assess and address inequities related to race and ethnicity, income, and geography.
- Unify authority and accountability across early childhood programs, which may drive improved results.
- Enhance communication across programs and with families, stakeholders, policy makers, and others.
- Sustain attention and support for early childhood in light of shifts in political priorities or leadership.
- Prompt greater interest in professional development and advancement of the child care workforce.

### **Additional ideas suggested by some community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and state officials in Minnesota for a change in early childhood governance, especially a consolidated approach**

- Allow human-centered redesign around families with needs and incorporate diverse perspectives.
- Avert potential failure for the early childhood system, particularly child care.
- Address child care access issues.
- Bring early child care and early education together.
- Weave racial and cultural equity into all aspects of early childhood policy and programming.
- Focus on Minnesota's egregious gap in learning levels across children of different races and ethnicities.
- Increase the possibility of higher pay for child care workers and higher income for child care businesses.
- Improve the status of child care, which is often undervalued.
- Link governance change to more funding and resources for early childhood.
- Address data sharing difficulties and obstacles.
- Recognize the trauma many young children bring to their care and learning environment.
- Try a new approach because coordination across agencies creates impediments to ideal service delivery.
- Change significantly how Minnesota addresses early childhood policy and programs.
- Foster positive changes for early childhood at the local level through changes in state-level governance.
- Reduce competition for early childhood resources among programs now spread across departments.
- Free up existing agencies to focus better on their priority areas outside of early childhood.
- Realize administrative cost savings by reducing duplication in services across agencies.
- Provide services for the families of young children through one central place in state government.
- Provide opportunities for public-private partnerships.
- Create a positive culture around administration of early childhood programs.

## **Uncertainties and limitations with consolidation**

The early childhood governance studies and national experts consulted point out limits to what states can expect from and accomplish through consolidation. The experts on governance that MAD spoke to cannot say with certainty which model works best or what impacts consolidation will have, in part because so many factors aside from governance influence outcomes. Those national experts declined to endorse one model over another.

Consolidation and other state-level governance changes are strategies for improving early childhood systems. They are not the goal. To move forward on outcomes for young children, states need other changes across a range of operational and service delivery areas. There is risk if consolidation shifts attention away from significant and broader problems with programs, services, and systems, or if it is pursued as a way to avoid addressing those challenges. But there are risks, too, with leaving state governance as is because consolidation may allow states to more easily address some challenges and improve programs and services.

## **Suggested potential drawbacks of consolidation**

Again drawing from studies, interviews, and discussion sessions, MAD compiled the following list of concerns and potential disadvantages of a shift from coordination across state agencies to consolidation either in a new, dedicated agency or into an established department. The list presents a full range of ideas from those sources.

### **Possible downsides for consolidation cited in the research and by the national experts consulted**

- May divert attention and funding away from efforts to improve alignment and effectiveness.
- Involves complex reorganization of programs and staff and may be hard to implement.
- Will alter coordination patterns and may require work to re-create channels and connections.
- Could complicate service delivery to children and families if the state decides poorly on agency scope.
- Might replace fragmentation of programs by type of service, common now, with fragmentation by age.
- May create disruptive, state-level shifts in provider engagement, oversight, support, and funding.
- Will impose a range of costs and require upfront resources as programs transfer.
- Could lead to reduced standing and influence as programs move out of large, established agencies.
- Could disrupt recent progress on coordination made under PDG and Minnesota's Children's Cabinet.

### **Additional concerns suggested by some community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and state officials in Minnesota for a change in early childhood governance, especially a consolidated approach**

- Will fail to address top early childhood challenges not related to governance.
- Might make links to broader family services difficult, undermining Minnesota's whole family approach.
- Might not succeed because consolidation will be an immense task.
- Might be pursued to cut costs rather than improve and expand early childhood services.
- Will still require coordination across agencies to encompass the many facets of early childhood.
- Could cause existing agencies to shift away from early childhood work and coordination efforts.
- Might intensify competition for funding and resources if the programs are in the same agency.
- Could make fragmentation worse at the local level, particularly for rural counties with limited staff.
- Would be difficult to implement now because state government is focused on the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Coordination of early childhood programs across agencies**

MAD also explored the possible benefits and drawbacks of Minnesota's current approach—state-level early childhood governance that depends on coordination across multiple state agencies. The following suggested advantages come from the studies, interviews, and discussion sessions MAD used to examine governance issues:

- A commitment to coordination at the state level can reduce some fragmentation and yield benefits.
- States that coordinate keep current structures in place, avoiding reorganization costs and disruptions.

- Placing early childhood services in agencies focused on education, health, and human services may result in easier coordination and some coherence with other programs in those policy areas.
- Early childhood programs benefit from the expertise of their host agencies in the relevant policy areas.
- The coordinated approach matches how federal funding flows to different departments in the states.
- Continuation of the coordinated approach, in Minnesota’s case, allows continuation of current efforts to increase coordination and alignment.
- States that use a formal office to coordinate across agencies may realize additional benefits, including a single point of contact for early childhood programs and increased visibility for this issue area.

The studies, interviews, and discussion sessions suggested the following disadvantages to the coordinated approach to governance:

- Early childhood programs may be less visible, perhaps resulting in inadequate attention and resources.
- Different agency goals and focus may lead to conflict over priorities for coordinating efforts.
- Informal, interagency coordination depends on busy division heads and program managers, who may lack the time and resources necessary to drive collaboration and coherence.
- Even successful coordination efforts may falter over time or with a change in administration.
- Work can become siloed in separate agencies and their divisions, as can program funding.
- Coordinated decisions are difficult to secure when programs, responsibilities, and authority are split.
- No one department or leader is responsible for early childhood as a policy and programming area.
- Total budget levels and funding for early childhood are difficult to identify and track.
- Coordination of state-level governance is unlikely to succeed without staff responsible for this work.
- Use of a formal office for coordination may involve additional disadvantages, including the costs and effort involved to establish such an office, a potential lack of authority to compel agencies to cooperate, and the potential for another layer of bureaucracy.

## Identifiable impacts of consolidation

The 2021 session law mandating this governance report requires attention five specific areas of potential impacts from consolidation on children, families and providers, and on state government operations. MAD discussed these as part of its limited number of interviews with prominent early childhood governance experts and early childhood advocates. Most said it is difficult to know how consolidation will affect these areas, again because impacts involve factors beyond governance. However, a few of the sources consulted offered comments. They said consolidation was most likely to have positive impacts on coordination and alignment among programs, the effort required of families to receive services to which they are entitled, and the effort required of service providers to participate in early childhood programs.

## Other information in the report

The full report that follows provides significantly more detail on the points noted in this executive summary. In addition, the full report offers information and summaries about the experiences of California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, and Oregon, all of which have moved or are moving to a consolidated approach. Finally, the full report presents findings from MAD interviews and discussion sessions with community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and State of Minnesota officials on what is working well or poorly under Minnesota’s current, coordinated governance structure.

# A look at early childhood governance for the State of Minnesota

During its first special session of 2021, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law mandating a report about state-level governance of early childhood programs for development, care, and learning. The legislature called for a focus on the consolidation of programs into a new department or an existing one and the impacts of consolidation on key areas for children and families, providers of early childhood services, and state government operations.<sup>1</sup>

In response to this legislative action, the Children's Cabinet asked Management Analysis and Development (MAD) within Minnesota Management and Budget to conduct research into state-level governance of early childhood programs and compile this governance report. MAD focused on the following research questions:

- What does the existing research into state governance for early childhood development, care, and learning suggest regarding identifiable pros and cons for different governance models, elements required for successful state-level consolidation of programs, consolidation's impacts, and other relevant considerations?
- What can the Children's Cabinet learn about early childhood governance and consolidation from experiences in other states?
- What can the cabinet learn from State of Minnesota officials at the departments that would be most affected by a change?
- What can the cabinet learn from engagement with community stakeholders and early childhood advocates, including members of the public?

MAD gathered useful information about state-level governance from a range of different perspectives. MAD found no consensus about the best governance approach to early childhood programs among the sources consulted, neither the reference research and national experts nor the community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and state officials in Minnesota. MAD learned that consolidation opens up possibilities for improved coordination, collaboration, and effective management across early childhood programs, services, and systems.

But MAD determined there is no one correct early childhood governance structure, and the choice of governance model cannot ensure improvements to early childhood programs and systems will happen. For this reason, MAD offers no recommendations for which model of governance Minnesota should use. States that have successfully consolidated report improvements and have leaders of their early childhood efforts in place at higher levels of state government, which increases visibility for early childhood policy and programs among political leaders and the public. However when choosing a governance approach for early childhood, states are advised to first identify priorities for improving programs and systems, then determine if a governance change can address those priorities, and, if so, which model will work best.

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<sup>1</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 2021, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 7, article 14, section 22, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2021/1/Session+Law/Chapter/7/>.

For this governance report, MAD reviewed dozens of studies about early childhood governance and the governance approaches of other states, interviewed and participated in webinars with a limited number of national experts, and gathered information about governance experiences elsewhere from officials in other states. In addition and importantly, MAD also used a limited number of discussion sessions and interviews to hear suggestions and opinions about early childhood governance from more than 100 community stakeholders involved in the delivery of early childhood services at the local level and advocates focused on early childhood issues. MAD held interviews and discussions, as well, with top officials, directors, and key staff at the Minnesota Departments of Education (MDE), Health (MDH), and Human Services (DHS) and the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet. To ensure a candid discussion, MAD chose not to identify commentators by name in this report for participants in the stakeholder and advocate discussions sessions, several interviews with advocates, and some discussions with State of Minnesota officials and staff. The top leaders at the agencies spoke for attribution, however. (For more on methodology, refer to the section below on page 72).

With only a few months to carry out research, MAD was able to engage in discussions with a limited range of community stakeholders and early childhood advocates through fewer than 10 online sessions mostly with existing groups. MAD did also review some relevant notes from extensive and recent engagement on early childhood issues done for the federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) renewal and for the federal Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. Time constraints also limited the number of national experts and State of Minnesota officials that MAD consulted for this report. Nonetheless, MAD concludes that more time, engagement, and interviews would not likely have led to clearer guidance on early childhood governance choices for Minnesota.

## State-level early childhood governance and common approaches among the states

This report focuses on governance for the State of Minnesota’s early childhood programs and systems. Governance is the organizational structure that states use to establish and place authority and accountability for decisions about programs, policy, management, financing, and implementation, in this case all related to early childhood development, care, and learning.<sup>2</sup> It provides a foundation for engagement, planning, implementation, administration, and oversight of early childhood efforts at the state level.

The approach to state-level governance shapes how Minnesota and other states handle program coordination and integration, funding and financial management, data and data systems, quality standards and program improvement, communications, and the overall direction for early childhood efforts. Governance shapes how programs and government units “are managed to promote efficiency, excellence, and equity.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance: An Analysis on National and Local Early Childhood Education Governance Structures,” Spring 2016, 3, [https://www.nmecfg.org/uploads/4/4/8/2/44820203/ece\\_governance\\_final.pdf](https://www.nmecfg.org/uploads/4/4/8/2/44820203/ece_governance_final.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Lynn Kagan and Kristie Kauerz, “Governing American Early Care and Education” in *Continuing Issues in Early Childhood Education*, by Stephanie Feeney, Alice Galper, and Carol Seefeldt, University of Maryland, 2009.

***“Early childhood governance is about the manner in which states organize themselves to support the effective and efficient delivery of services that provide children and families with high-quality support.” Elliot Regenstein<sup>4</sup>***

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The approaches states use for early childhood governance fall into one of three general categories, although the specifics differ significantly from state to state:

- Consolidation of programs into a free-standing agency or department, often dedicated solely to early childhood
- Consolidation of programs into an existing state agency with a broader mandate than early childhood—often education or human services
- Coordination of early childhood programs offered through more than one state agency, with some states having no formal office to advance coordination among these different agencies but others using a formal office or their governor’s office to drive coordination and alignment<sup>5</sup>

Nationwide as of late July 2021, 29 states used a coordinated approach, 8 states had freestanding agencies dedicated solely to early childhood, and 13 states plus the District of Columbia consolidated programs within a state agency with a broader focus than early childhood alone, according to the Education Commission of the States.<sup>6</sup> The number of states using the coordinated approach will drop, however, with several states now in the process of transitioning from coordinated approaches to consolidated ones. For example, Colorado will do so by July 2022 and Oregon by January 2023. Both Missouri and Virginia have consolidated some programs into their departments of education, with Missouri establishing an Office of Childhood there.

## Minnesota’s coordinated approach to early childhood governance

Minnesota currently uses the coordinated approach to state-level governance for early childhood programs across separate departments. Unlike some states that take this approach, the State of Minnesota lacks a formal office to advance coordination, but coordination of early childhood policies, programs, and resources is an

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<sup>4</sup> Elliot Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance: Getting There from Here,” Foresight Law+Policy Advisors, June 2020, 14, [https://www.flpadvisors.com/uploads/4/2/4/2/42429949/flp\\_gettingtherefromhere\\_061120.pdf](https://www.flpadvisors.com/uploads/4/2/4/2/42429949/flp_gettingtherefromhere_061120.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Early Care and Education Governance,” updated July 30, 2021, <https://www.ecs.org/early-care-and-education-governance/> (download PDF infographic); and Elliot Regenstein and Katherine Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing a State-Level Early Childhood Governance System,” Build Initiative, May 2013, 4 and 6, <https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Early-Childhood-Governance-for-Web.pdf>.

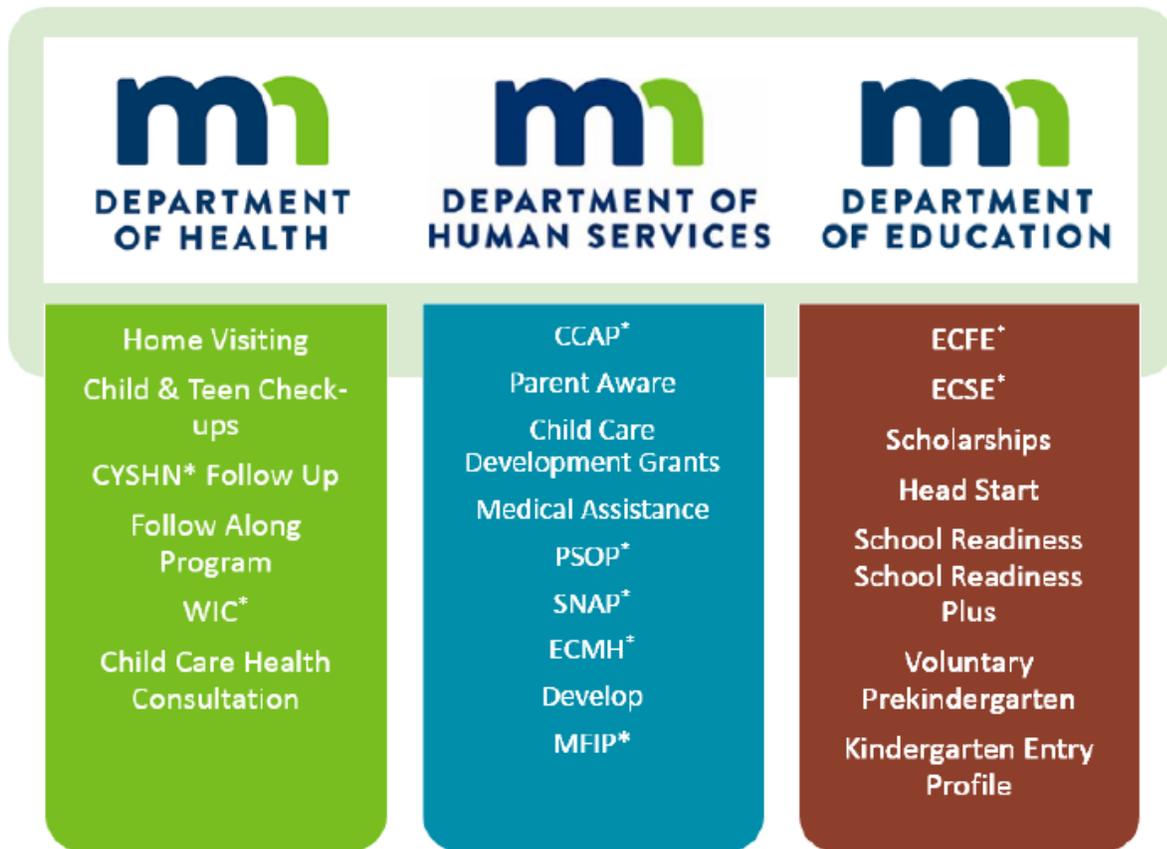
<sup>6</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Early Care and Education Governance.”

important part of the work done by the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet and its staff to support improved outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

## Programs and services across multiple state agencies

Early childhood programs in Minnesota are spread primarily across MDE, MDH, and DHS based on the match between the policy focus of the programs and that of the agencies. Figure 1 highlights placement for some early childhood programs by agency under Minnesota’s coordinated approach to governance.

**Figure 1. Overview of select early childhood programs under MDE, MDH, and DHS<sup>8</sup>**



*\* CYSHN: Children and Youth with Special Health Needs Follow-Along Program; WIC: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children; CCAP: Child Care Assistance Program; PSOP: Parent Support Outreach Program; SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; ECMH: Early Childhood Mental Health; MFIP: Minnesota Family Investment Program; ECFE: Early Childhood Family Education; ECSE: Early Childhood Special Education*

<sup>7</sup> Early Childhood Systems Reform Project Team, “Early Childhood Systems Reform,” Minnesota Children’s Cabinet, October 2018, 25, <https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/2-gen/early-childhood-systems-reform-year-one-final-report.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Early Childhood Systems Reform Project Team, “Early Childhood Systems Reform,” 5.

Other agencies, too, offer programs and services important to young children in Minnesota. In 2018, the Early Childhood Systems Reform Team, with oversight from the Children’s Cabinet, produced a guide to more than 40 government programs serving children and families in Minnesota and operating from eight different state agencies.<sup>9</sup> Focusing in just on child care, the staff for the Children’s Cabinet recently produced a listing of more than 30 programs, initiatives, studies, and advisory groups and task forces from five state agencies. (Refer to Appendix A on page 75.) Commissioners from 22 state agencies participate in the Children’s Cabinet, which includes early childhood as a focus but has a broader mandate to address areas for children from the prenatal period to young adulthood.<sup>10</sup>

## A whole family approach

In their coordinated efforts to address the needs of children, Minnesota’s agencies and the Children’s Cabinet emphasize whole family approaches to policies and programs that “focus on creating opportunities for and addressing the needs of both children and the adults in their lives together.”<sup>11</sup> This holistic approach has expanded coordination for state-level early childhood efforts beyond the traditional range of programs and services for children to programs that address the economic stability, health, and wellbeing of the family unit, including adults. The state broadened the range of agencies involved with the Children’s Cabinet partly in recognition of this whole family philosophy.

## Minnesota’s federal Preschool Development Grant

The State of Minnesota recently received a three-year, \$26.7 million Preschool Development Birth through Five grant (PDG) from the Office of Early Childhood Development within the US Department of Health and Human Services. This funding is available to the state through December 2022.<sup>12</sup> PDG funding has allowed the State of Minnesota to assign managers and staff at different departments to focus on coordination of early childhood programs and systems within and across state government—a development that has had a significant and positive affect on collaboration and alignment.<sup>13</sup> MDE, MDH, DHS, and the Children’s Cabinet are responsible for planning and implementing the PDG-funded work.

PDG funding supports a range of interagency early childhood efforts, including among others newly established Community Resource Hubs for families in need of services, expansion of the Help Me Connect online navigator

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<sup>9</sup> Early Childhood Systems Reform Project Team, “Minnesota Services and Supports for Families with Young Children,” Minnesota Children’s Cabinet, January 2018, <https://mn.gov/gov-stat/pdf/Minnesota%20Supports%20and%20Services%20for%20Families%20with%20Young%20Children.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> “Minnesota Children’s Cabinet,” Minnesota Management and Budget, accessed December 15, 2021, <https://mn.gov/mmb/childrens-cabinet/>.

<sup>11</sup> State of Minnesota, “Preschool Development Grant Mid-Grant Report,” no date, p. 4, available via <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/>.

<sup>12</sup> For detailed information, go to Minnesota’s “Preschool Development Grant” website at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/>.

<sup>13</sup> Conclusion supported by comments MAD gathered from State of Minnesota officials, community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and a national expert on early childhood governance. These comments are presented in other sections of this report.

for families searching for services, increased Community Solutions grants from the state for healthy child development, more infant and early childhood mental health consultation, progress on early childhood workforce and business strategies, and coordinated eligibility and service through a formal agreement among MDE, MDH, and DHS to improve this important element of program delivery.<sup>14</sup>

Under a federal PDG planning grant, Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, and Human Services along with the Children’s Cabinet engaged in an extensive 2019 community engagement effort involving more than 1,300 people through almost 90 events in communities across the state. They used findings for a needs assessment and a strategic plan focused “on supporting families with young children who are experiencing racial, geographic, and economic inequities so they can be born healthy and thrive within their families and community.” The strategic plan goals related to governance include ones about increasing availability and access to supports and services, leveraging solutions developed at the community level, leveraging the oversight of the Children’s Cabinet, and establishing systems across agencies that “make it easier for families to access what they need to thrive.”<sup>15</sup> Resulting actions from state government have included development of the hubs and expansion of Help Me Connect and the Community Solutions grants.

Minnesota’s PDG work also fosters collaboration through twice-monthly meetings of division directors, managers, and supervisors at MDE, MDH, and DHS. The PDG work incorporates input and insights from community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and parents through advisory councils for specific PDG-funded initiatives and a subcommittee that focuses on the PDG efforts overall.

## The role of the Children’s Cabinet

The Children’s Cabinet is an interagency partnership engaging leaders across state government “to bring efficiency and effectiveness to state government efforts to improve child and youth outcomes.”<sup>16</sup> The cabinet is currently made up of 22 agency commissioners and co-chaired by Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan. Under the direction of Walz and Flanagan, the cabinet fosters collaboration and coordination among state agencies on programs and services for children from prenatal to young adulthood using a whole family approach. Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) provides staffing and administrative support for the Children’s Cabinet.

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<sup>14</sup> State of Minnesota, “Preschool Development Grant Mid-Grant Report,” 7–18; and State of Minnesota, “Eligibility and Service Coordination,” no date,

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/elig/index.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> State of Minnesota, “Preschool Development Grant Strategic Plan 2020-22 Draft,” no date, 4 and 6, [https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_FILE&dDocName=MDE032767&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=MDE032767&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary). For more information about the PDG strategic plan and the needs assessment, go to the Minnesota Department of Education website on “Preschool Development Grant” at

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/>. Data above on engagement events came from an internal MDE memo and includes events held in late 2019 and not included in the count from the strategic plan.

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Children’s Cabinet,” Minnesota Management and Budget.

The Children’s Cabinet was started in 1993 by Governor Arne Carlson.<sup>17</sup> After the Carlson Administration, the cabinet was somewhat inactive for a time until Governor Mark Dayton re-launched it in 2010s with a focus on early childhood and with leadership from the commissioners of Education, Health, and Human Services. In August 2019 as part of an executive order on “Placing Children at the Center of Government,” Walz expanded the cabinet beyond the 10 commissioners cited in state statute for this body to also include the heads of another 12 state agencies.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to its regular, cross-agency meetings for the commissioners and senior leaders of 22 state agencies, the current cabinet also organizes meetings for an Interagency Leadership Team of division directors and staff at MMB, MDH, DHS, MDE, and the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). It also convenes cross-agency action teams using a results-based accountability lens in five priority areas: child care and early education, educational opportunity, housing stability (with leadership from the Interagency Council on Homelessness), mental health and well-being, and healthy beginnings (focused on infant and maternal health).

Regarding specific initiatives and efforts to increase coordination of early childhood programs across state agencies, the Children’s Cabinet took the following actions, among others, during the Dayton Administration:

- Participated in the Early Childhood Systems Reform Project aimed at ensuring children and families receive needed supports
- Convened the Early Learning Council established under requirements for the federal Head Start program and included in Minnesota state statute as the State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care<sup>19</sup>
- Supported the state-local Help Me Grow partnership focused on developmental milestones and referrals for families
- Worked with agencies in the early stages on Minnesota’s federal preschool development planning grant, including on the in-depth community engagement used for the needs assessment and preschool development strategic plan
- Participated in the team for Transforming Minnesota’s Early Childhood Workforce, focused on those serving children from birth through age eight

Work on interagency and coordination by the Walz-Flanagan Children’s Cabinet includes the following, to cite these limited examples:

- Partnering with MDE, MDH, and DHS on the implementation of the federal PDG, including support for agency coordination and leadership engagement, a co-lead role on coordinating eligibility and services; work done to execute a data sharing agreement between MDE, MDH, and DHS for coordinating eligibility and services; in process development of recommendations on the state’s role in supporting early care and education businesses; and assistance with PDG sustainability planning.

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<sup>17</sup> Minnesota Statute, 4.045 Children’s Cabinet, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/4.045>.

<sup>18</sup> State of Minnesota Executive Order 19-34, “Placing Children at the Center of Government,” August 7, 2019, [https://mn.gov/governor/assets/2019\\_08\\_07\\_19-34\\_tcm1055-397454.pdf](https://mn.gov/governor/assets/2019_08_07_19-34_tcm1055-397454.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Statute, 124D.141 State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/124D.141>.

- Leading on COVID-19 response for children and families, including a co-lead role in the Governor’s Education and Child Care COVID-19 Response Workgroup and collaboration with agencies to execute the Walz-Flanagan Administration’s COVID-19 child care response for coordinated communication, financial supports, and policy changes.
- Coordinating with the Governor's Office and agencies on early childhood legislative and budget priorities and coordinated legislative engagement on early childhood policy.
- Developing—in process now—the state’s first comprehensive children’s fiscal map tool with shared parameters to tag and track state resources expended on children by state agency.
- Leading Minnesota's participation in the Early Care and Education Business Collaboratory to help states with child care systems.
- Convening and providing administrative support for the Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force that was established by the 2021 state legislature to develop a plan and an implementation timeline for addressing child care access, affordability, and a quality workforce that is adequately compensated.
- Securing and leading innovative partnerships with the private sector to improve processes and engage relevant agencies and stakeholders on recommendations to improve cross-agency systems.

## Local level administration of programs and services

In Minnesota—and in a number of other states nationwide—state government operates some key programs for young children, but counties, school districts, tribal governments, and other local and regional entities administer the services. This is true, for example, with Minnesota’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). DHS oversees CCAP, but counties and tribal governments administer it. In this case, DHS distributes federal and state child care funding to reimburse counties for their payments to child care providers that serve qualified families in the program. Counties contribute their own funds as well.<sup>20</sup> As another example, MDE currently depends on two tribal governments and 10 regional organizations to administer its state-funded Early Learning Scholarships. And Minnesota is one of nine states that depend on counties to administer child welfare services and programs, such as foster care and child neglect and abuse prevention—services important for both young and older children.<sup>21</sup> Minnesota is also one of 10 states that depend on county administration for the broader, federally funded social services programs of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance.

Local administration of state programs creates a statewide infrastructure at the local level designed to meet specific needs in that geographical area. At the same time, variations from local area to local area under county-

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<sup>20</sup> For more on state and local roles in child care assistance, review the December 2021 brief on “Child Care Assistance: An Overview” from Minnesota House Research at <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/ss/sscca.pdf>, and the description of “Minnesota’s Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)” from the Public Health Law Center of Mitchell Hamline Law School at <https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/datapages/minnesota-child-care-assistance-program-ccap>.

<sup>21</sup> “State vs. County Administration of Child Welfare Services,” the Children’s Bureau of the US Department of Health and Human Services, accessed December 30, 2021, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/services/>.

administered efforts can result in inconsistent service delivery with less state-level influence than in state-administered systems. Local administration of early childhood programs and services also means challenges occur with coordination and implementation at those local levels as well as the state level. In addition, local level administration of early childhood services requires coordination between the state and local levels. All of this comes into play when considering early childhood governance.

In 2020 as part of state efforts to encourage local coordination and cooperation, the Children’s Cabinet and MDE worked with the Department of Administration’s Data Practices Office on an opinion related to data sharing at the local level for eligibility and services, with a focus on the implications of the Minnesota Data Practices act for schools and counties.<sup>22</sup> Again to encourage local progress, the State of Minnesota is using PDG funds to develop a toolkit that supports coordination and data sharing at the local level between schools, counties, community-based organizations, local public health agencies, and other entities supporting children and families. Local coordination is helped along some, too, by more than 40 Family Services Collaboratives statewide that involve counties, school districts, public health agencies, community action programs, and Head Start organizations in the design and implementation “an integrated local service delivery system for children and their families that coordinates services across agencies and is client centered.”<sup>23</sup> The 1993 Minnesota Legislature created these collaboratives and provided funding for planning and implementation<sup>24</sup> but then later discontinued that funding.

## Attention to shortcomings and governance

Shortcomings with Minnesota’s early childhood programs and systems are well-documented. In a 2018 evaluation report focused on nine major early childhood programs within three state agencies, Minnesota’s Office of the Legislative Auditor wrote, “The array of early childhood programs is complex and fragmented, due in part to differences in the way programs are funded and variation in their eligibility and other requirements.”<sup>25</sup> Around that same time, the state’s Early Childhood Systems Reform Project, overseen by the Children’s Cabinet, released a report highlighting stark racial inequities in metrics for early childhood well-being and health and “programmatically siloes that can create frustration for families as well as lead to inefficient use of resources.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Office of Data Practices, “Advisory Opinion 20-005,” Minnesota Department of Administration for the Minnesota Department of Education, April 14, 2020, <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/opinions/library/#/detail/appId/1/id/428247>.

<sup>23</sup> “Collaboratives,” Minnesota Department of Human Resources, accessed December 30, 2021, <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/policies-procedures/childrens-mental-health/collaboratives/>. For more on Family Services Collaboratives, review Minnesota Statute, 124D.23 Family Services and Community-Based Collaboratives, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/124D.23>.

<sup>24</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 1993, Session Law. chapter 224, article 11, section 10, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1993/0/Session+Law/Chapter/224/>.

<sup>25</sup> Office of the Legislative Auditor, “Early Childhood Programs: 2018 Evaluation Report,” State of Minnesota, April 2018, S-1, <https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/pedrep/earlychildhood.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Early Childhood Systems Reform Project Team, “Early Childhood Systems Reform, 4 and 7.

***“Minnesota state leaders and early childhood advocates and stakeholders have been engaged in efforts to increase the quality, coordination, and efficiency of state services supporting young children and their families. However, despite many advances that have been made, there continue to be persistent racial disparities in access to high quality early childhood programming and developmental outcomes.” Early Childhood Systems Reform Project Team<sup>27</sup>***

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The State of Minnesota has long explored governance changes as a way to improve early childhood programs and services. As far back as 1993, Governor Arne Carlson proposed that the state replace the Department of Education with a new department focused on addressing needs from birth through the teenage years. In response, the legislature created the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, which had as part of its purpose coordinating and integrating state and local programs for families and children.<sup>28</sup> Then in 2003 under Governor Tim Pawlenty, Minnesota moved away from this broader scope and reestablished its narrower Department of Education, shifting some early childhood programs back to DHS while retaining others in MDE.<sup>29</sup> (Refer to Appendix B: Past approaches to early childhood governance for Minnesota on page 79 for more detail about this change in governance and about other governance topics noted in this section.)

In 2009, the legislature mandated a 2010 study for how to transition the Child Care Assistance Program and related grants from DHS to MDE to better align child care and early learning and to improve educational outcomes for Minnesota’s children.<sup>30</sup> In 2011, a task force for Minnesota’s Early Childhood Advisory Council recommended a freestanding, cabinet-level office of early learning. The task force called for the new office to have authority over important areas of the state’s early childhood work but did not reach a recommendation on whether to co-locate early childhood programs from the different state agencies.<sup>31</sup> That same year, the state created an Office of Early Learning within MDE under the federal Race to the Top grant, with alignment of supports from across Minnesota’s state agencies as part of its mission.<sup>32</sup> The office was dismantled at the end of the grant, and the Children’s Cabinet took on some of the coordination and alignment responsibilities.<sup>33</sup>

More recently, Rep. Dave Pinto, Chair of House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee, introduced legislation in 2021 to create a new department of early childhood and consolidate programs from MDE, MDH, and DHS, with a focus on children from birth through age four. That spring, Kids Count on Us and the Educator Policy Innovation Center released a report that labeled Minnesota’s approach to early childhood policy and

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<sup>27</sup> Early Childhood Systems Reform Project Team, “Early Childhood Systems Reform,” 3.

<sup>28</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 1995, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 3, article 16, section 1, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1995/1/Session+Law/Chapter/3/>.

<sup>29</sup> Karen Cadigan, Nara Topp, and Stephanie Clothier, “Office of Early Learning,” Early Childhood Advisory Council, January 2011, 11, <https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/2011/mandated/110109.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services in conjunction with Minnesota Department of Education, “Early Learning Study: Move and Standards,” February 2010, 24, <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-6084-ENG>.

<sup>31</sup> Cadigan, Topp, and Clothier, “Office of Early Learning,” 7 and 26.

<sup>32</sup> Office of Early Learning, presentation to the Minnesota Legislature, Date unknown, 3, <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/ba6aa5e4-af93-4386-9e1f-411ad7ec8e9c.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Melvin Carter and Kelly Monson, “Early Childhood Systems Building Proposal,” memo, June 28, 2016, 3.

programs “chaotic, inequitable, and in urgent need of dramatic overhaul.”<sup>34</sup> Those advocacy groups called for a freestanding department of early childhood to consolidate key programs for children birth through four.

## Possible early childhood governance options for the State of Minnesota

MAD offers the list below of options and potential approaches for changing early childhood governance at the state level, not all of them mutually exclusive. There may be other possibilities as well. This list reflects MAD’s analysis of information about state-level governance approaches, included throughout in this governance report.

Given the level of interest in improved state-level governance for early childhood programs in Minnesota, MAD suggests action is warranted. At a minimum, Minnesota should sustain the increased coordination across agencies in recent years under notable efforts by the Children’s Cabinet and through the funding and initiatives of the federal Preschool Development Grant. The federal PDG ends in December 2022, although plans are underway to continue elements of the PDG-funded work. Additional action on governance might yield additional benefits.

### **Continue to coordinate across agencies but with the staff, funding, and authority necessary to carry this out.**

The State of Minnesota has made significant progress with interagency and intra-agency coordination for early childhood programs under PDG, according to many community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, State of Minnesota officials, and others consulted for this governance report. Much room for improved coordination remains. If Minnesota were to continue its current approach to early childhood coordination across state agencies, the state could commit dedicated staff for this important undertaking, secure funding for that staff and their work, and establish organizational authority as necessary to drive the efforts.

### **Increase funding and staff for the Children’s Cabinet and expand its role in cross-agency coordination and alignment.**

A number of those consulted for this report cited the Children’s Cabinet as important to recent improvements in coordination of early childhood programs and policies across agencies. Some of those same individuals noted resource constraints that make it difficult for leaders and staff at the cabinet to address the coordination challenges. Increases in funding and staff would help, as would expanded roles. For example, the Children’s Cabinet could be charged with compiling an early childhood budget proposal for submission to the governor and, ultimately, the legislature. It could also collect and analyze funding for early childhood efforts from across departments to identify total funding and unmet needs at that funding level—a task closely related to current fiscal mapping work by cabinet staff to identify and track state budget funding allocated to programs, services, and interventions for children.

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<sup>34</sup> Lynn Hoskins, Mary Solheim, Kimberly Antonsen, Debra Messenger, Rachel Reinfeld, Zach Johnson, Suad Hassan, Kiarra Zackery, Kirsten Ragatz, Rachel Johnson, and Karin Swenson, “Minnesota’s Birth–4 Care and Education System,” Kids Count on Us and Educator Policy Innovation Center, 1, 2021, [https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/GaSi\\_2JVIEOsvYvp3ajouA.pdf](https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/GaSi_2JVIEOsvYvp3ajouA.pdf).

**Set the key priorities to address for the state-level early childhood system, analyze whether a change in governance will significantly affect them, and, if so, decide what form of governance would work best.** As noted in later sections of this report, governance is a means to an end. Research and experts suggest that states identify a few key priorities and goals for improving their early childhood systems and determine both whether governance will address them and, if so, what form to choose. Minnesota has documented issues with its current early childhood system but should further identify system priorities, as well as carefully analyze whether a change in governance will have a significant impact on them. Community engagement and planning carried out for the federal Preschool Development Grant and the federal Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant might prove useful for this work.

**Create an office within state government charged with coordinating early childhood programs and the early childhood system across state agencies.** As noted elsewhere in this report<sup>59</sup>, some states that take a coordinated approach to early childhood programs across different agencies use formal state offices to foster that coordination and alignment. These offices operate below the cabinet level and may be housed within an agency or the governor's office. Minnesota's Office of Early Learning in the Education Department, back in the early 2010s, had coordination of early childhood programs across agencies as part of its mission. Minnesota could establish a new, formal office now to take on this role, perhaps as an initial step toward consolidation in the future.

**Ensure early childhood policy and programs are consolidated within each of the three key departments, perhaps under assistant commissioners or with coordination assigned to assistant commissioners.** The core of the state's early childhood programs is housed in MDE, MDH, and DHS. Many of those programs are consolidated within those separate agencies—albeit not across them—through, for example, the Division of Early Learning at MDE and the Division of Children and Family Services at DHS. One initial step toward interagency consolidation might be to further consolidate early childhood within each of the three departments and perhaps create a coordinating office to work with intra-agency units that affect early childhood in important ways, such as Medical Assistance and the Minnesota Family Investment Program. Placing the consolidated divisions under assistant commissioners or assigning assistant commissioners to coordinate with other agencies would increase the profile for early childhood.

**Commit to consolidation of early childhood programs and policy, define the appropriate scope for the age range and program areas, and engage in planning to increase support and lay the foundation for this change.** A later section of this report presents ideas for what Minnesota needs to do to succeed with consolidation of early childhood programs (page 28). These include dedicating staff time to the consolidation effort, identifying the appropriate scope for both age range and programming, planning for the consolidation, and mapping the administrative and practical requirements. These steps could occur in response to legislation that mandates consolidation and allows time first for scoping and planning, or they could happen prior to a legislative commitment to consolidation and help define what consolidation would entail and how. Real work on consolidation—either into a new, dedicated agency or as part of an existing one—would require funding and resources. It might involve working groups or task forces that include key community members, providers, local government representatives, and state leaders and staff. By focusing on plans and practical issues, the activities proposed here would move the state beyond continued study of governance as an issue and toward action steps.

*“Could [consolidation] be done in a damaging way? Sure, but could it be done well? Yes. I hope, if done well and with fidelity, it would provide services to families that prepare children, regardless of income and race and ethnicity.” Early childhood advocate*

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**Mandate consolidation now and work through needed adjustments and potential missteps later as these become clear during implementation.** Some of those consulted for this study want action on consolidation now, although this was not a consensus among those MAD engaged overall on the governance question. Those seeking immediate action on consolidation expressed frustration with the current early childhood system and viewed legislatively mandated consolidation as a way to push needed change even if consolidation may have drawbacks. The proposed 2021 legislation for a department of early childhood identified specific early childhood programs for consolidation from across MDE, MDH, and DHS and defined early childhood as spanning the period from birth through age four.<sup>35</sup> Early childhood governance expert Elliot Regenstein of Foresight Law+Policy points out that states can move forward with governance changes that have support and make adjustments as needed later, instead of spending time searching for the ideal structure at the front end.<sup>36</sup>

# Consolidation for state-level early childhood governance

## States shift toward consolidated approaches

Historically, state governments—as well as their federal and local government partners—have developed early childhood programs to address different aspects of development, care, and learning. Consequently, states have used separate departments and divisions to engage in the work and have drawn from separate funding streams to support it. In addition, the private sector is primarily responsible for delivering many early childhood services, such as child care, sometimes with public funding. These factors have led to fragmented and siloed public sector efforts in the field of early childhood.<sup>37</sup>

The resulting challenges have prompted state governments to change early childhood governance as a way to increase coordination and alignment. Since the early 2000s, a significant number of states have moved away from the traditional approach of managing early childhood programs across different state agencies and toward consolidation of major programs within an existing state agency, a new agency dedicated to early childhood, or

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<sup>35</sup>For more on Chair Pinto’s proposed legislation, go to [https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF1024&version=0&session=ls92&session\\_year=2021&session\\_number=0](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF1024&version=0&session=ls92&session_year=2021&session_number=0).

<sup>36</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 70.

<sup>37</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems: Examining Program Integration,” Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, October 2016, 4, <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/governingstateearlychildhoodsystemsrevisedcoded.pdf>

in some cases a new agency focused more broadly on children, youth, and families.<sup>38</sup> The shift among states has accelerated in recent years, although about half the states continue to use a coordinated approach across multiple agencies.<sup>39</sup>

The national experts on early childhood governance that MAD consulted cite a number of factors for the recent rise in states pursuing consolidation. For one, those involved in early childhood efforts increasingly take a holistic approach to the opportunities and challenges rather than focusing on stand-alone programs matched to the different areas of development, care, and learning, according to Regenstein, who has written numerous reports on state-level governance of early childhood programs. Consequently, some states have pursued coordination and consolidation for initiatives traditionally housed in separate agencies for education, health, and human services.<sup>40</sup>

Lori Connors-Tadros, a senior fellow at the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University and also the author of numerous reports on governance, notes greater emphasis in recent years on the critical importance of early childhood policy and therefore growing interest in serving children better. This has led to frustrations with the inefficiencies and shortcomings of coordinated work across different state agencies and thus more consolidation, she said.<sup>41</sup> In addition, increased attention to early childhood has resulted in more state and federal funding for programs, perhaps making early childhood an area worth consolidating and separating out within state government.

Interest in consolidation also stems from a push by those involved in early childhood to raise this area of state policy and programming to a level on par with the established priority areas for state government and the departments that address them. The importance of early childhood is elevated with the creation of a new agency or a major new division within an existing agency.<sup>42</sup>

It is worth noting that consolidation at the state level might occur in steps and change over time as states learn from their experiences, adjust, and perhaps expand what they include in their consolidated departments or divisions, according to Regenstein. The desire to consolidate “doesn’t mean you have to do everything in one fell swoop,” he said. “It should be an ongoing evolutionary process.”<sup>43</sup> In his 2020 report on early childhood governance, Regenstein writes, “[T]he states that have led in this area have seen the work as an ongoing process over the course of many years.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 3.

<sup>39</sup> Data from the Education Commission of the States, “Early Care and Education Governance.”

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Elliot Regenstein, Partner, Foresight Law+Policy, November 11, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Lori Connors-Tadros, senior fellow, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University, November 3, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 70.

## Reasons cited for why states consider consolidation

Drawing from studies, reports, and a limited number of interviews with governance experts, MAD identified a range of reasons cited for why states pursue consolidation of early childhood programs and services into new dedicated agencies or existing state departments. While it is difficult to tie consolidation of state-level governance directly to specific impacts and outcomes for early childhood programs and systems,<sup>45</sup> changes to the organizational structure are often seen as a strong base for potential improvements. The improvements that states hope to secure from consolidation of early childhood programs vary and include those listed below.

**Coordination:** Public sector early childhood efforts developed as a patchwork of programs across federal and state agencies and funding streams, resulting in a fragmented approach. Consolidation is seen as a way to connect parts of the early childhood system to improve coordination of goals, approaches, and resources.<sup>46</sup>

**Alignment and integration:** The many different early childhood programs run by separate state and federal agencies have often differed in their eligibility rules, application procedures, technology systems, data collection practices and databases, evaluation measures, quality standards, planning processes, licensing and qualification requirements, and other approaches. Policies, regulations, and standards may be duplicative and out of alignment.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, consolidation may create opportunities for better alignment and integration—or at least an improved understanding of the differences program to program.<sup>48</sup> With consolidation, better alignment, and greater integration, families and service providers have one entry point into state government for early childhood programs and services. While there is no one way for states to organize early childhood programs, increasingly states are moving away from the idea of “no wrong door to ‘we want fewer doors for children and families,’” said Dan Wuori of the Hunt Institute.<sup>49</sup>

**Efficiency:** Consolidation might hold promise for increasing the efficiency of operations and service delivery, with resulting gains for families, providers, and state government. The hope is that bringing early childhood programs into one area of state government will lead to improved oversight, better allocation of staff and other

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<sup>45</sup> Lori Connors-Tadros, Rolf Grafwallner, Jana Martella, and Thomas Shultz, “Defining Highly Effective Offices of Early Learning in State Education Agencies and Early Learning Agencies,” Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes, June 2018, 1, [http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Highly\\_Effective\\_SOEL\\_June\\_2018.pdf](http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Highly_Effective_SOEL_June_2018.pdf); and Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 14.

<sup>46</sup> Harriet Dichter, Lori Connors-Tadros, and Neal Horen, “Early Childhood Governance: A Toolkit of Curated Resources to Assist State Leaders,” June 2021, Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, 3, [https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdg-b5\\_governancetoolkit\\_acc.pdf](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/pdg-b5_governancetoolkit_acc.pdf); and New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16.

<sup>47</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 5.

<sup>48</sup> Dichter, Connors-Tadros, and Horen, “Early Childhood Governance,” 3; and New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16.

<sup>49</sup> Dan Wuori, Senior Director of Early Learning for the Hunt Institute, in a session on “Sustaining Early Childhood Governance” at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: “Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems,” October 20, 2021

resources, and reduced duplication of services and administrative functions. This could make it easier for families to access services.<sup>50</sup>

**Quality**<sup>51</sup>: Consolidation could allow, too, for improved and more consistent quality across the range of early childhood programs and services through unified approaches to assessment, formal evaluation, and performance management.<sup>52</sup> A consolidated approach may draw more attention to early childhood programs and in this way shine a light on opportunities for improvements.

**Leadership**: Consolidation will establish senior-level leadership positions with influence and authority focused on early childhood policy and programs, Connors-Tadros said.<sup>53</sup> Commissioners, in cases of dedicated departments, and perhaps assistant commissioners, in the case of consolidation within established agencies, interact with governors and other top leaders and have the authority necessary to work effectively across state agencies.

**Visibility and profile**: An identifiable department or new, major division with high-level leadership increases the visibility of early childhood as an important area for state policy and programs and may elevate its profile with policy makers and the public.<sup>54</sup> A dedicated department for early childhood programs and systems offers a stronger foundation to stand on for authority, funding, and staffing, Connors-Tadros said.<sup>55</sup>

**Equity**: Moving major early childhood programs into the same department may make it easier for state government officials to assess and address inequities in services and outcomes related to differences in the race and ethnicity, income, and geography of participating children and families.<sup>56</sup>

**Authority and accountability**: Consolidation unifies authority and accountability across early childhood programs, which may drive improved results. Consolidation offers greater clarity about “whose... job it is to make sure that the early childhood system is functioning as a whole, and who is in a position of authority to

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<sup>50</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 15; and Susan Robison, *State Human Services Organization: Strategies for Improving Results*, National Conference of State Legislatures, 197, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> This report includes multiple references “quality.” In the context of early care and education, quality is often formally defined as a state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is used “to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs” (from the federal Administration for Children and Families at <https://ecquality.acf.hhs.gov/>). Parent Aware, which is Minnesota’s QRIS, sets standards for care and education programs and encourages providers to engage in continuous quality improvement. In some cases, the sources consulted for this report referred to “quality” in this formal sense, but most often they used “quality” in a general sense to refer to how well early care and education programs are serving children, families, and communities based on broader concepts that might relate, for example, to child development overall, cultural relevance, and family satisfaction.

<sup>52</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16.

<sup>53</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 21.

<sup>55</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>56</sup> Dichter, Connors-Tadros, and Horen, “Early Childhood Governance,” 4.

bring that system to functionality,” Regenstein said.<sup>57</sup> Without consolidation, authority and accountability are dispersed and fragmented.<sup>58</sup>

***States have increasingly sought to develop new governance structures that consolidate authority and oversight of programs and services under one roof. Because current systems of early childhood governance are typically dispersed through multiple agencies and departments, an effective model of governance should create coherence, foster accountability and transparency, and improve quality and accessibility.”<sup>59</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership***

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**Communications:** Moving early childhood into one department may lead to enhanced communication across programs and services.<sup>60</sup> Increased coordination could also lead to better communication with stakeholders, policy makers, early childhood professionals, and—importantly—families, thus making it easier for the latter to know about and access services.<sup>61</sup>

**Sustaining early childhood efforts:** Establishment of a consolidated, dedicated agency or a new, major division might improve chances that early childhood policy and programs receive ongoing attention and support when political priorities shift or there is a change in executive branch administrations.<sup>62</sup> Conversely, however, consolidation could make early childhood programs more discernable and a potential target for cuts.

**The early education workforce:** Consolidation may prompt greater interest in the early childhood workforce, perhaps increasing opportunities for professional development and advancement of those who work in the field.<sup>63</sup>

**Additional considerations for consolidation into an existing agency:** Consolidation of early childhood programs into an existing state agency may offer several other potential benefits, beyond those listed above. By building a consolidated division or office of early childhood within an established agency, states can take advantage of the existing organizational and operational infrastructure and avoid the cost and effort of duplicating them for a new agency. In addition, consolidation within an existing department may allow for better integration of services for young children beyond the early years—if done within a department of education, for example.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Dichter, Connors-Tadros, and Horen, “Early Childhood Governance,” 3.

<sup>59</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 3.

<sup>60</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16.

<sup>61</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System to Support Children and Families: A State-by-State Analysis,” December 2018, 26, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Creating-an-Integrated-Efficient-Early-Care-and-Education-System-to-Support-Children-and-Families-A-State-by-State-Analysis.pdf>; and New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16.

<sup>62</sup> Dichter, Connors-Tadros, and Horen, “Early Childhood Governance,” 3.

<sup>63</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16.

<sup>64</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 20.

Consolidation into an existing agency might also prove to be a more manageable consolidation step and one that could lead to a new, dedicated agency later.<sup>65</sup>

## What Minnesota needs for successful consolidation

If the State of Minnesota chooses to consolidate its early childhood programs, leaders in the legislature, the governor’s office, and the departments involved will need to know how to make that work. To address this, MAD researched what needs to happen and what needs to be true for success with consolidation. MAD asked for ideas and direction from community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, state officials, and early childhood governance experts consulted for this report during its interviews and discussion group sessions. MAD also reviewed studies and reports about state-level governance for insights into how to consolidate early childhood programs. The points below emerged as important steps or considerations. The list attempts to document the many notable suggestions and may include more than Minnesota is able to pursue, depending upon timing and capacity.

**Determine purpose and priorities first, not the governance approach.** The research and the experts urge states not to start with a governance model as the first step but to instead identify a limited number of priorities and goals for improving the early childhood system and then determine what governance change is needed to address them, if governance is relevant. This important point came up repeatedly in the research and interviews with governance experts and a few early childhood advocates—that states should start with the ends, not the means. For early childhood at the state level, settle on purpose and a few key issues, lay out measures that will affect them, and in this way decide whether a governance change will likely be a solution.<sup>66</sup>

***Whatever it is, you should be very clear why you are changing governance. Have a clear sense of what it is you’re trying to accomplish and then design the change to accomplish that.... The design has to follow from the goals and there needs to be some process to get clarity on what do we want to accomplish and how we will accomplish it.” Elliot Regenstein<sup>67</sup>***

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States need to analyze the link between the key issues and purpose for early childhood and a specific governance model. “This is the classic idea that form should follow function,” said an early childhood advocate. “You can’t really pick the form without the function.” In some cases, a link to governance may be very clear, as is true if the purpose is to move leadership for early childhood to the senior levels of state government, Regenstein said—something that happens automatically when a state creates a department and has a

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<sup>65</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Lori Connors-Tadros, Kaitlin Northey, Ellen Frede, Katherine Hodges, and Tracy Jost, “Effective State Offices of Early Learning: Structural Features, Enabling Conditions, and Key Functions in Four States,” NIEER, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, May 2021, 2, <https://nieer.org/research-report/effective-state-offices-of-early-learning-structural-features-enabling-conditions-and-key-functions-in-four-states>; New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 14; Robison, *State Human Services Organizations*, 200; and Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 13.

<sup>67</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

commissioner of early childhood. Careful analysis of whether governance matches to a state’s purpose and key issues may help sway those focused on the short term and reluctant to change the status quo for long-term gains, as well as those who “are fixated on a single option for change” rather than the benefits and costs for a range of options.<sup>68</sup>

***“Experts overwhelmingly agree that the right governance model will differ from state to state. A change in governance is not a “silver bullet” to fix all early childhood education issues within a state, but rather the structure should be seen as a strategy that state leaders can use to achieve early childhood education and care goals and develop a sustainable [early care and education] system.” New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership<sup>69</sup>***

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**Build on what’s been done.** State officials repeatedly noted that in the last several years there have been marked improvements in Minnesota’s early childhood system that should not be lost, including strengthened relationships, streamlined processes, and better data sharing. PDG and the Children’s Cabinet have been catalysts for this improvement, and the state should build on this progress for any governance changes instead of starting new. State officials also said Minnesota should look to other states for guidance and lessons learned in this area.

**Engage the wide range of those involved in early childhood, both early in the process and throughout.** States need to engage widely for success with early childhood initiatives to foster collaboration, build trust, and seek input.<sup>70</sup> For consolidation or other major governance changes, engagement brings in multiple perspectives that are useful for complex decision-making and help create buy-in among the invested parties.<sup>71</sup> “It would be great to have community engagement as a strategy from the front end,” a community advocate said.

Engagement on a change in governance could include parents, providers and front-line workers, advocates, and government leaders. Effective governance should include perspectives from families that have children with special needs, are experiencing homelessness, include immigrants, or have other specific circumstances that affect their situations.<sup>72</sup> It should also include leaders and key staff from the state agencies that currently house early childhood programs because of their knowledge of administrative and practical considerations and their importance to the success of the change.<sup>73</sup> State of Minnesota officials noted that families should be consulted and listened to in the process. “You have to have everybody at the table,” one advocate said.

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<sup>68</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 21.

<sup>69</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 4.

<sup>70</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “Capacity Building Self-Assessment Tool,” Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, revised January 2020, 5, <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/systemsbuilding/systems-guides/capacity-building-self-assessment-tool>.

<sup>71</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 17–18.

<sup>72</sup> Connors-Tadros, Grafwallner, Martella, and Shultz, “Defining Highly Effective Offices of Early Learning,” 5.

<sup>73</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 14–15.

***“Ongoing stakeholder engagement is so important because it is really the barometer for how the system affects people. You have some that are always engaged with the state, so they know how long the process takes. But some folks are never engaged. They’re living their lives and they’re not familiar with the process. So, we’re always going to be here. We’re always going to come back and reflect back on what we heard. It changes the dynamic.” Aressa Coley<sup>74</sup>***

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For engagement on a change in governance, the State of Minnesota should consider recent successful efforts, including engagement done for the federal Preschool Development Grant renewal and for the federal Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant.<sup>75</sup> Engagement for consolidation might involve focused, working meetings.<sup>76</sup> Officials in both Georgia and Oregon talked about the need to be intentional with stakeholder engagement and the importance of regular meetings with providers and advocates.<sup>77</sup> In Missouri, early childhood officials held over 100 stakeholder engagement activities.<sup>78</sup>

**Link governance changes to more resources for early childhood.** Improved governance alone is unlikely to address capacity constraints within the early childhood system and should be linked to the increased funding and resources needed to meet demand for services, expand access, and improve quality. Some worry state leaders may focus on governance to avoid calls for increased funding.<sup>79</sup> Seek more funding and resources as part of the reorganization effort and tie it to specific outcomes for children and families.<sup>80</sup> A new agency will need to have both access to those resources and authority over them, an early childhood advocate said. “There needs to be enough resources for that agency to do its job.” State of Minnesota officials also emphasized the need to fully fund a new governance structure and its early childhood programs.

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Aressa Coley, West Ed Project Director, California Preschool Development Birth through 5, November 22, 2021.

<sup>75</sup> For more information about these community engagement efforts, go to the Minnesota Department of Education’s website on “Needs Assessment and Community Engagement” at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/NeedsPlan>; and the Minnesota Department of Health’s website, “Title V Maternal and Child Health Needs Assessment,” <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/titlev/assessment.html>.

<sup>76</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 18.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Amy Jacobs, Commissioner of Department of Early Care and Learning, State of Georgia, November 19, 2021; and written responses to MAD questions from Alyssa Chatterjee, Early Learning System Director, State of Oregon, November 22, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Written responses to MAD questions from Pam Thomas, Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood, State of Missouri, November 19, 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 21.

<sup>80</sup> Miriam Calderon, Early Learning Systems Director for the State of Oregon, and Elizabeth Groginsky, Secretary of Early Childhood Education and Care for the State of New Mexico, in a session on “A Strategic Approach to Governance and Financing the ECE System” at the PDG B-5 TA Center, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, July 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4oDM-FgNBmA&feature=youtu.be>.

***“Moving programs around without building capacity will not change outcomes. If anything, moving programs around without increasing capacity might make it more difficult for them to function, making governance a diversion from the real solutions the programs need.” Elliot Regenstein<sup>81</sup>***

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**Secure support from government leaders.** Dedicated leadership is critical to the success of a governance change. States that have consolidated early childhood efforts have had support from their governors prior to implementation.<sup>82</sup> In New Mexico, the recent shift in governance was a high priority for the governor and had support among legislators.<sup>83</sup>

**Identify the appropriate scope for both age range and programming.** What Minnesota consolidates into a new early childhood department or division will depend on how early childhood is defined. The age range is most commonly defined as birth through age five, but early childhood is viewed by some as ranging from birth through eight or even ten.<sup>84</sup> The Preschool Development Grant from the federal government’s Office of Early Childhood Development uses birth through five.

Beyond age, consolidation will involve questions as well about the policy and programming areas to include. Some earlier consolidation moves in Minnesota focused on early learning, but recently introduced legislation covered early development, care, and learning. Even within the range of services covered, the state will need to define which programs are included in a consolidated department or division and which remain in their current agencies. Because not all programs that affect young children likely will be included in a consolidated department or division, consolidation efforts at the state level need to recognize an ongoing need for interagency connectivity and coordination.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 69.

<sup>82</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 14.

<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Groginsky, Secretary of Early Childhood Education and Care, State of New Mexico, in session on “Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change” at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: “Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems,” October 21, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 51.

<sup>85</sup> Elliot Regenstein, Partner, Foresight Law+Policy, “Early Childhood Governance,” in a session on “Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change” at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: “Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems,” October 21, 2021.

## Case Summary: District of Columbia

As part of a larger effort in the mid-2000s to coordinate aspects of the District of Columbia's education system, the Division of Early Learning moved from the mayor's office to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education. The Division of Early Learning houses most of the district's early childhood programs—child care, quality improvement, some preschool—with some child care subsidy eligibility determination remaining in the Department of Human Services and Family Home Visiting staying in the Department of Health.

Having programs all in one agency has allowed the District of Columbia to strengthen partnerships, streamline screening, and improve family experiences, according to Sara Mead, Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning for the District of Columbia. The Early Learning Division still coordinates with the Department of Human Services on eligibility for child care subsidies—a relationship that is generally working well, with clear roles documented in a formal memorandum of understanding. The Division of Early Learning sets the policies for the child care subsidy and performs audits, and Human Services determines eligibility and transfers funding for the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program (TANF). This streamlines the process with eligibility for other programs.

While the District of Columbia's early childhood programs are generally well-funded, that is largely the result of political will, rather than having a dedicated early childhood division, Mead said.

**Dedicate staff time to the consolidation effort.** Experience among the states that have consolidated early childhood programs indicates the importance of dedicated staff time to carry out planning and implementation. Unless the consolidation effort is identified as a formal part of their work plan, staff responsible for moving it forward may face too many competing priorities and too little time to give consolidation the attention it needs.<sup>86</sup> It may work best to designate a team of agency staff to provide oversight and accountability.<sup>87</sup>

**Plan for the consolidation.** Start consolidation and integration efforts with a planning phase that involves state government staff and leadership but also, and importantly, providers and community members.<sup>88</sup> All MAD's interviews with Minnesota agency officials touched on the importance of planning for a major governance change. Thoughtful planning may garner support for the consolidation from those involved and affected, including, of course, the agencies that house the early childhood programs to be moved.<sup>89</sup>

One community stakeholder said the state should indeed plan for consolidation and also ensure that the planning process is inclusive and incorporates the diversity of those served through early childhood programs. A number of community stakeholders and early childhood advocates said the state's plan itself needs to make equity a priority—racial and ethnic equity and equity between rural and metro areas. Other stakeholders and

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<sup>86</sup> Regenstein, "Early Childhood Governance," 18.

<sup>87</sup> Ashley Long, "State Early Childhood Governance Structures Landscape Analysis: Recommendations for California," Long Consulting Solutions, January 2020, 15, <https://earlyedgecalifornia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/State-Early-Childhood-Governance-Structures-Landscape-Analysis.pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> State Capacity Building Center, "State Early Childhood Systems," 11.

<sup>89</sup> State Capacity Building Center, "State Early Childhood Systems," 11.

advocates emphasized the need to focus the process clearly on the needs of families and children, first and foremost. “We have to be recentring the conversation around the needs of families and kids instead of stakeholder interests,” an advocate said.

***“There needs to be a vision and a really clear road map with outcomes, and we all need to be able to see ourselves in it—maybe a sort of statewide plan.” Community stakeholder***

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The process overall might involve a strategic plan, one that establishes a vision for the consolidated department or division, promotes coherence in the state’s approach, and lays out concrete benchmarks to guide both policies and procedures.<sup>90</sup> In Minnesota’s case, the recently produced PDG strategic plan might prove useful. To ensure objectivity, states might want to consider establishing an independent review board to analyze what is needed and make recommendations for the plan.<sup>91</sup> States should explicitly plan, too, for the transition of programs and staff to the new department or division.

***“A transition plan should be developed to ensure services are not disrupted to children and their families during the governance change and to recommend the best way to migrate services to the new department over time.” Ashely Long<sup>92</sup>***

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**Map the administrative and practical requirements for consolidation.** Consolidation will require strategies for managing operations, shifts in staff, and impacts on funding streams and business systems.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps as part of the planning process, states should map out changes and requirements across a range of areas, including the expected costs of restructuring, the organizational chart, management capacity, resource allocation, data systems and sharing, other IT system issues, budgeting and accounting practices and procedures, training, supervision, salary structures, cultural competencies, communication, and quality improvement systems.<sup>94</sup> A State of Minnesota official noted that a new consolidated agency will also need a robust support structure that mirrors those in existing agencies, addressing, for example, legal counsel, regulatory, equity, finance, and human resources.

***“Think through implications of money that you’re moving around. Early childhood funding is complicated, in ways, because you’re combining federal funds and state funds when you move them from one agency to another.” Sara Mead<sup>95</sup>***

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There are also a number of program-specific complications Minnesota would need to address. For example, child care health and safety regulations for children from birth through age three are much different than those

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<sup>90</sup> Connors-Tadros, Grafwallner, Martella, Shultz, “Defining Highly Effective Offices of Early Learning,” 3.

<sup>91</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System,” 30.

<sup>92</sup> Long, “State Early Childhood Governance Structures Landscape Analysis,” 16.

<sup>93</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 17.

<sup>94</sup> Robison, *State Human Services Organization*, 200; New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 16; Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 64; State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 13; State Capacity Building Center, “Capacity Building Self-Assessment Tool,” 8–12.

<sup>95</sup> Mead interview, November 2021.

for children ages four and five. As noted later in this report, regulations for Part B special education of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) dictate that the program must reside in the state’s special education agency, so Minnesota will need to determine how best to ensure an early childhood department develops and maintains a strong connection with IDEA Part B special education—and with IDEA Part C early intervention services if those remain with the Department of Education. Ensuring special education stays connected to early childhood programs is something both Oregon and Colorado are working on. In Oregon, special education is disconnected from early childhood, so the state is examining how to foster collaboration with its Early Learning Department.<sup>96</sup> As Colorado plans for consolidation, that state is investigating how to align education and early childhood without duplicating services or creating additional layers.<sup>97</sup> If the Child Care Assistance Program and Family Home Visiting are to move, the state will need to carefully consider and manage their separation from other programs within the agencies that currently house those services.

**Determine authority for restructuring programs and agencies and work through compliance issues as necessary.** Consolidation will require significant reorganization and restructuring. For this, the state will need to identify the required shifts, determine when authority for them rests with the executive or legislative branches, and make them happen. In addition, analysis of legal and compliance issues likely will be necessary in the case of some programs and their funding streams to ensure compliance with federal and state laws and rules.

**Address IT issues and data sharing challenges.** The state’s IT systems and data sharing issues are often cited as obstacles to potential improvements for early childhood programs and the early childhood system. Data experts at DHS and MDE said that, while doable, consolidation would require extensive work to ensure data can follow programs into a new agency. For example, agency experts noted complications with data tied to restricted information, such as social security numbers. In this area, DHS has the statutory ability to share data from the state’s program for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)—including data from the CCAP—with other state agencies that it deems “welfare agencies,” but it needs clarification. A consolidated early childhood agency would need to be designated as a welfare agency and also designed in a way that allows data sharing with counties. Instead of moving them to its newly created early childhood agency, Missouri chose to leave data systems that relate to early childhood with their original agencies and change staff permissions for access and use, but data remains one of the state’s biggest challenges.<sup>98</sup> Georgia left its Family Home Visiting data with its health department due to federal privacy rules for health data requirements.<sup>99</sup>

Additionally, current processes at the State of Minnesota require many layers of approval for granting access to data. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) is addressing several data problems noted in the 2018 evaluation of early childhood programs by the Office of the Legislative Auditor,<sup>100</sup> but additional partnerships and resources are needed to achieve data goals. Finally, while most data entry is automated at the state level, data at the local level is often manual and involves paper forms—so more automation at the local level would improve data quality, simplify data transfer at the state level, and strengthen data privacy.

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<sup>96</sup> Chatterjee responses, November 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Kristina Heyl, Early Childhood Leadership Commission Director, State of Colorado, November 30, 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas responses, November 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>100</sup> Office of the Legislative Auditor, “Early Childhood Programs,” S-1.

Unaddressed, these IT challenges would likely limit the potential benefits of consolidation, an early childhood advocate said. State agencies have made progress recently, improving data governance, creating data integrators, and using new data sharing agreements, but much work remains.

**Designate a convener within state government.** Because no state consolidates all programs that serve young children, officials in many of the other states MAD consulted indicated the need for a convener across agencies, even with consolidation. Several other states noted this as a key responsibility for a consolidated agency or office of early childhood at any level. As Commissioner Amy Jacobs of Georgia noted, her Department of Early Childhood and Learning (DECAL) is the only agency that focuses on people ages birth through five, but there are still programs in other agencies that serve that age group.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, DECAL convenes agencies focused on health, human services, education, and other areas.<sup>102</sup> Thrive by 5 DC, the District of Columbia’s early childhood initiative, acts as the district’s convener.<sup>103</sup> Oregon’s Early Learning Division (ELD) within the Department of Education has recently grown into the convening role as the governor’s designated point of contact and coordinator of pandemic-related child care funds. ELD is now preparing to become the Department of Early Learning and Care and, as it coordinates with the state’s Departments of Education and Human Services, has brought to light how under-resourced the departments are for coordination efforts.<sup>104</sup>

***“It would be very important not to lose any ground MDE has gained in improving kids’ transition into kindergarten regardless of where they are coming from.” Commissioner Heather Mueller<sup>105</sup>***

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**Involve the state agencies.** The departments that currently house early childhood programs have deep knowledge and experience with this policy area and with the administrative ins and outs of service delivery. Consolidation will involve “a shift in resources, authority, and power” for the departments that now house early childhood programs, which may leave agency leaders wary of the change, said an early childhood advocate. Those agencies will play a significant role in the consolidation and its success, so it will be crucial to involve them in the planning and implementation of a change.

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<sup>101</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>102</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Mead interview, November 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Chatterjee responses, November 2021.

<sup>105</sup> Minnesota Department of Education interview, November 2021.

## Case Summary: California

In July 2020, California implemented the Child Care Transition Act of 2020, shifting its early childhood education programs—state-funded PreK, Head Start collaboration office, transitional kindergarten— to the existing Social Services Department in its Health and Human Services Agency. Family Home Visiting remains in the Public Health Department of that same agency. The state recently began to phase in universal transitional kindergarten for four-year-olds, too, with its Department of Education providing early learning and the Social Services Department providing “supports,” such as childcare, housing, and TANF to children and families.

California is already seeing benefits. The move has allowed for much better coordination between child care and housing supports, health and wellness supports, and TANF. Aressa Coley, PDG Director at the California nonprofit WestEd, called this a “big step in moving into the whole child system.” The changes make a clear delineation between early learning in the Department of Education and supports in the Department of Social Services.

A two-year visioning process that included deep stakeholder engagement primed California’s legislature for reorganization. In 2020 Governor Gavin Newsom also created the Early Learning Childhood Policy Council, which includes parents, providers, state agencies, and service deliverers. The state also developed a master plan based on two years of work by the legislature’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education. But even with that progress, California found a year for reorganization planning—in the midst of a pandemic—was too little time.

Communication with staff was a key priority. The Department of Social Services started from the ground up, fostering trust with staff and illustrating that differing philosophies of service delivery among the consolidated units were actually complementary. The department held quarterly stakeholder calls and worked closely with local resource and referral organizations, education agencies, and community-based organizations to address provider anxiety about contracts and family concerns about access. “It really has helped set the stage for a truly family-centered, whole child approach that would’ve been infinitely more challenging if spread across multiple agencies,” Coley said.

Like Minnesota, California social programs are administered at the county level. California has been intentional about building partnerships and increasing capacity across the state, involving WestEd to help with stakeholder engagement. The state created a cross-agency stewardship group through PDG that includes 18 state agencies. California also uses the hub mode, including resources and referrals to increase regional capacity and approaching local organizations to understand what guidance and tools they need. WestEd provides ongoing stakeholder engagement with system implementers through multiple channels: blasts, webinars, blogs, websites, and dedicated emails. The approach relies heavily on local partnerships. “Ongoing stakeholder engagement is so important because it is really the barometer for how system affects people,” Coley said.

California’s Child Care Transition website: <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/calworks-child-care/child-care-transition#:~:text=Child%20Care%20Transition%20The%20Early%20Childhood%20Development%20Act,for%20the%20children%20and%20families%20in%20our%20state.>

**Consider impacts on local service delivery.** Local-level partners and their service-delivery infrastructure are very important to state early childhood programs, and governance changes will affect them. This is particularly true in Minnesota and other states that depend on local and regional governments and entities to administer programs. Consequently, states and their local partners should identify potential positive and negative impacts from a change in governance on counties, school districts, tribal governments, child care providers, and others—and the impacts a governance change will have on the relationship those partners have with the state. For governance, states might “start with what you want the state-local relationship to look like and then figure out how the state should be structured to support that,” Regenstein said.

Coordination at the local level is also important. Several states have developed local or regional structures to ensure coordinated service delivery. Georgia has created family support specialists at the regional level to connect families with appropriate resources.<sup>106</sup> Oregon has developed a hub approach for local coordination, using cross-sector governance boards as required by contract.<sup>107</sup> This hub model is being adapted and applied in California and Missouri, according to interviews with officials in those states. (Minnesota recently established community resource hubs as part of its PDG-funded efforts.) California also has 12 resource and referral regions.<sup>108</sup> Washington Communities for Children (WCFC) has 10 regional coalitions across the state, and through them it has relationships with more than 600 organizations and individuals, including early learning providers, social service agencies, early intervention services, child welfare organizations, libraries, juvenile courts, school districts, public health agencies, higher education, families, and many others.<sup>109</sup>

State of Minnesota officials said a change in governance structure will disrupt the delivery of early childhood services. Consolidation will mean new relationships and new ways of operating. Hundreds or maybe thousands of contracts would need to be changed. Officials agreed that temporary disruptions alone should not stand in the way of a governance change, but they urge careful consideration of the service delivery impacts if a change is made in order to minimize those disruptions.

**Take time and weigh timing.** With a significant change in state-level early childhood governance, there is a tension between the urgency to move forward fast to improve results and the amount of time needed to successfully execute the change, Regenstein said.<sup>110</sup> But consolidation will take time. “One risk that is inherent in all of [the changes in governance] is to think that this is going to happen quickly,” Connors-Tadros said. “It won’t.”<sup>111</sup> Implementation science finds it can take two to four years to create, operationalize, and sustain new programs. Ambitious, system-level changes such as consolidation may take longer.<sup>112</sup>

New Mexico created its Department of Early Childhood Education and Care in July 2020, almost a year and a half after the legislation authorizing that new agency. Colorado, which is transitioning, also will take about a year and half to plan.<sup>113</sup> Oregon and California each allowed one year for planning, though California officials said one

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<sup>106</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>107</sup> Hub handout from OR interview

<sup>108</sup> Coley responses, November 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Bohanon and Kelley interview, November 2021.

<sup>110</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>112</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 6.

<sup>113</sup> Heyl interview, November 2021.

year was not enough.<sup>114</sup> Connors-Tadros said it might take three years or more for a state to implement consolidation.<sup>115</sup>

In Georgia, much of the implementation for its child care subsidy program has happened in stages, over the period after the early childhood programs were consolidated.<sup>116</sup> Child care licensing and quality were part of the original Georgia consolidation in 2004, while the administration of the state’s child care subsidy transitioned in 2012, and eligibility determination transitioned in 2017.<sup>117</sup> The proposed 2021 legislation to create a Minnesota department of early childhood included a two-year transition period.

The hope is a consolidation process will move along as fast as is reasonable. “A long-prolonged conversation about how you’re going to change the structure is deadly, so it cannot drag on for years,” said DHS Commissioner Jodi Harpstead.<sup>118</sup> Timing matters, too, as the state’s policy and program responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have strapped the agencies that house most of Minnesota’s early childhood programs. At one point, 75 percent of the staff with the MDH’s Child and Family Health Division were reassigned to focus on the virus.<sup>119</sup>

**Communicate.** Success with consolidation at the state level involves clear, consistent, and coordinated communication.<sup>120</sup> Communication matters for providers and community members but matters too for those inside state government. Lachelle Brant with the Governor’s Office in Wyoming talked about the need for administration officials to communicate with policymakers.<sup>121</sup> A Minnesota agency official told MAD that communication from legislators to state staff about early childhood governance would be beneficial as well.<sup>122</sup> Importantly, the state will need to communicate what gains will result from consolidation in order to attract support for a consolidation plan, said both a community stakeholder and a state official.

**Manage the organizational change.** Consolidating programs into a new department or division of early childhood will bring together staff from existing state agencies and units with different organizational cultures—that is, the values, norms, and attitudes that influence how work gets done.<sup>123</sup> “This is a massive change management process, and those are not guaranteed to go well,” Regenstein said.<sup>124</sup> The state will need to

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<sup>114</sup> Chatterjee responses, November 2021; Coley responses, November 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>116</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>118</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services interview, November 2021.

<sup>119</sup> Molly Meyer, Blair Harrison, and Sarah Dunne, “Minnesota’s 2020 Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant Needs Assessment: Description of Methods and Findings,” Minnesota Department of Health, no date, 34, <https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/communities/titlev/titlevneedsassessplan.pdf>.

<sup>120</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 63.

<sup>121</sup> Lachelle Brant, Senior Policy Advisor, Wyoming Governor’s Office, in session on “Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change” at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: “Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems,” October 21, 2021.

<sup>122</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>123</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “Capacity Building Self-Assessment Tool,” 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

engage in change management to minimize disruptions and manage expectations. “[O]therwise there is a high risk that essential tasks will be resisted,” Regenstein writes in his 2020 report on governance.<sup>125</sup>

Officials in California, Georgia, and Washington mentioned that work culture change can be particularly challenging when combining differing philosophies, such as those that focus on regulatory compliance and those that focus on service delivery. The California Department of Social Services dedicated time to fostering trust across staff and showing them how these philosophies are related and not contradictory.<sup>126</sup>

Consideration is needed, too, for unionized workers—managing the state’s relationship with the union and ensuring adequate capacity to handle the transition, said Sara Mead, Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning for the District of Columbia.<sup>127</sup> For the State of Minnesota, many collective bargaining agreements require that worker representatives are involved in planning that may result in layoffs.<sup>128</sup> State law requires that restructuring for Minnesota’s agencies “include efforts to ensure that fair and equitable arrangements are carried out to protect the interests of executive branch employees and to provide the best possible service to the public.”<sup>129</sup>

**Hire an excellent manager at the top.** Connors-Tadros and Regenstein both said states need a talented manager at the top to consolidate early childhood programs into a new department or division. That leader should be credible, willing to take risks, and able to involve a wide range of people in the discussions and decisions about consolidation, Connors-Tadros said.<sup>130</sup> The first leader of a consolidated department or division should be skilled at integrating programs from different areas of government and people from different work cultures, Regenstein said. While later leaders might focus on the broad vision and big picture, the first top manager for a consolidated organization needs to excel at “knitting the pieces together, because if you don’t do that, the new agency isn’t going to function.”<sup>131</sup>

## Motivations and suggested potential benefits for a governance change in Minnesota

MAD conducted discussion sessions and interviews with community stakeholders and early childhood advocates in Minnesota, as well as officials with Minnesota state agencies. Participants in those conversations suggested potential benefits from a change in governance, as well as the possible challenges and downsides that are noted

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<sup>125</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 65.

<sup>126</sup> Coley interview, November 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Sara Mead, Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning, District of Columbia, November 22, 2021.

<sup>128</sup> “Restructuring: Is It Time to Reorganize? Making the Decision, implementing the change,” Management Analysis and Development, Minnesota Management and Budget, accessed December 29, 2021, <https://mn.gov/mmb/mad/resources/restructuring/>.

<sup>129</sup> Minnesota Statute, 43A.045

<sup>130</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>131</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

later in this report. MAD sought comments on the pros and cons of consolidation from all participants, regardless of whether they favored consolidation, opposed it, or had mixed reactions to it.

## Priorities suggested for what a change in Minnesota’s governance approach might address

In some discussions and interviews with community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and State of Minnesota officials, MAD asked for standout problems that participants want to solve through a change in governance. Many who suggested specific problems to solve through governance focused on possible impacts from consolidation, but MAD posed this question about governance broadly without specifying consolidation as the form of change. Consequently, the problems and opportunities noted in this section may be applicable to shifts in governance beyond consolidation. By answering this question, the sources identified their primary reasons to pursue a governance change. The suggestions listed here highlight priorities, in effect, and in this way differ from the potential benefits from consolidation covered in the next section.

### Priorities for community stakeholders and early childhood advocates

The following list captures comments from community stakeholders and early childhood advocates about the top problems and high-priority issues they would like a change in governance to address. Some of the points link more closely or obviously to governance than others, but all were cited as possible effects from change.

**Family-centered design:** A shift in governance for early childhood programs and services should allow human-centered redesign around families with needs and incorporate diverse perspectives beyond those of the white middle class. “When you are creating something new, there are things you can do that will make it easier for families,” a community stakeholder said.

**System worries:** The early childhood system may be in danger of failure, particularly when it comes to child care and the child care workforce, so change is needed now, a community stakeholder said. Without it, Minnesota may lose its existing—albeit limited—infrastructure. “The risk is that we will have to build the whole child care system from the bottom up.”

**Child care access:** Access to child care for families is a major problem, and one that a change in governance should address.

**Child care and education, together:** Consolidation should bring early child care and early education together—two areas mostly separated within the state’s current governance structure. The Minnesota statute calling for this governance report puts the focus on early childhood development, care, and learning.

**Equity and cultural competency:** A change in governance should weave racial and cultural equity into all aspects of early childhood policy and programming. To address Minnesota’s wide disparities in outcomes for children, the state should learn from the experiences of Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color and their communities, one early childhood advocate said. “We need to make sure that we are working on the capacity at the local level for culturally competent and diverse providers,” another advocate said.

## Case Summary: Oregon

Oregon leaders decided to launch a new Department of Early Care and Learning by January 1, 2023, seeing it as an opportunity to build a system that puts equity at its foundation. The new department grew out of several experiences that state had with coordination and consolidation of early childhood programs, according to Alyssa Chatterjee, Oregon's Early Learning Systems Director.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first reached the United States, Governor Kate Brown directed the Early Learning Division of the Oregon Department of Education to serve as the policy lead for all decisions regarding the Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) program in the state's Department of Human Services (ODHS). Also, the Early Learning Division, created in 2013, has provided valuable insights into the benefits of consolidation. For example, Chatterjee said, Oregon found that separating early childhood as a unit within state government improves its visibility to the legislature and the public, and also reduces fragmentation that is created when related programs like preschool and child care are administered by agencies with different policy perspectives and responsibilities for more expansive programs like TANF.

Additionally, the Oregon Department of Education, a pass-through agency for most funding, does not have the infrastructure to support early learning's programs, which are largely grant-funded. Finally, the Oregon Department of Human Services programs are focused mostly on adults, in contrast to ERDC, and this leads to policy differences.

There are challenges associated with "untangling" programs from their current agency, Chatterjee said. ERDC is particularly difficult to separate from ODHS, and part of the program will stay in ODHS for at least a few years. Federal rules require that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B preschool special education resides in state departments of education, but Oregon is also looking at how to foster stronger collaboration between its new Department of Early Care and Learning and special education.

Oregon has retained a project management company to help with needs assessments, change management, and implementation. Oregon is also laying out an extensive stakeholder engagement campaign.

Local coordination in Oregon is done through regional Early Learning Hubs that work with providers across the range of early childhood services to foster local, family-centered systems. Oregon codified its use of hubs in 2015 after a two-year demonstration project. The strength of the hubs is in the cross-sector nature of their governance boards, which involve early care and education, human services, mental health, health, K-12 education, and the private sector. Oregon is continuously working to perfect the hub model, including partnering with other coordination entities and clarifying roles with resource and referral entities, according to Chatterjee.

**Attention to achievement or opportunity gaps:** A governance change should focus on Minnesota's egregious gap in learning levels across young children of different races and cultures in order to address impacts on children beyond their early years, an early childhood advocate said. "That has to be important to what happens."

**Addressing low incomes for child care providers:** The child care system is plagued by low pay for workers and low income for owners of child care businesses. The state should consider this challenge as it weighs a change in governance because the state needs a stable, quality workforce when it comes to early childhood care and learning. Minnesota should commit to raising up those working in child care, many of whom live in poverty, one advocate said. “It’s insane, unethical, and exploitative.” Some community stakeholders and early childhood advocates said consolidation would lead to higher pay and incomes.

**Improved status for child care:** One problem for the early childhood system is that care for children is often undervalued and seen as “nothing more than custodial care,” said a community stakeholder. With a governance change, “find a way to address the low-level status of early childhood education.”

**Funding and resources:** More funding and other resources are needed to improve the state’s early childhood system, so a change in governance should be linked to increases.

**Durability:** For a change in governance, find an approach that gives durability to the area of early childhood within the State of Minnesota’s government structure. Pick an approach with staying power beyond one particular executive branch administration or another. Do not leave the focus on outcomes for young children and families “to the political winds,” one community stakeholder said.

**Data sharing:** Several stakeholders and advocates who talked about top problems that governance should address cited data sharing difficulties and obstacles. Data collection, management, and analysis is done separately within multiple state departments, making it difficult to aggregate the data and use it to identify who is getting served and what impact programs are having overall. Privacy regulations are both important and problematic. One stakeholder talked about “playing charades with data” to stay within the letter of the law but still alert a colleague to circumstances relevant to service delivery for a child. “That’s all I hear,” another stakeholder said. “We can’t share the information, so the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing. But... [the] information could really help.” Some expressed concern that while consolidation could bring together different and scattered elements of the early childhood system, data sharing would continue to be problematic because of separate databases and rules that protect the data.

**Efficiency:** A new governance approach should address inefficiencies across the fragmented early childhood system, including differences in program eligibility and the separate entry points into the system for families seeking varied types of help. In this case, the State of Minnesota could build on progress made under the federal PDG and with the coordinated MN Benefits application process that DHS recently set up, some said.

**Attention to trauma:** Minnesota needs an early childhood system that recognizes the trauma many young children bring to their care and learning environment, something that is missing in the current system, a community stakeholder said.

## Case Summary: Georgia

Georgia Governor Sunny Perdue created the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) in 2004 to focus education funding and “change the landscape for kids,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy Jacobs. Perdue worried an early learning office would get lost in a large state agency, so he opted to create an agency for children ages birth through five. There was resistance to moving the state’s child care subsidy out of the Department of Human Services at first, but DECAL took on administration of the subsidy in 2012 and eligibility determination in 2017. Family Home Visiting remains in the Department of Health, and Preschool Special Education remains in the Department of Education.

Regarding creation of the new department, Jacobs said it takes time for people to shift perspectives, so DECAL is still adjusting to the work culture change. One major challenge was transforming the child care subsidy to a program that improves access to early learning, rather than a public welfare program. This required ongoing discussion and training. Jacobs believes that if programs were spread across multiple state agencies, it would have been impossible to shift from a regulatory philosophy to one that is supportive and gets the message of access and learning across to families.

DECAL has assumed the role of convener for conversations on early childhood topics, including maternal health and family supports. Coordination is intentional and involves many cross-agency agreements, like those for data sharing. Regional family support specialists assist with coordinating programs at the local level, so families have connections to early childhood programs, K-12 education, TANF, and other services. “I’ve always felt really fortunate to have structure all under one roof and to coordinate zero to five so parents have a one-stop shop,” Jacobs said. DECAL intentionally engages with stakeholders and offers child care services at its engagement sessions so parents can attend. The state also contracts with the Urban Institute to conduct community focus groups.

In terms of costs for the consolidated agency, DECAL may have experienced some savings initially, but costs also increased because of expenses for building a new agency and its support structure for finance, human resources, and other operational areas. When asked whether elevating early childhood to a cabinet-level agency increased state funding for early childhood, Jacobs said, “There’s definitely an advantage to being a separate agency with a separate budget that can quantify [impacts] with data and can also raise private dollars.” DECAL’s separate, nonprofit arm with 501(c)3 IRS designation has allowed it to raise more than \$20 million in philanthropic funds over seven years.

While DECAL does not have empirical research evidence to know whether its status as a stand-alone agency has improved child outcomes, the department’s focus on quality has improved professional development for child care workers, something that should affect quality, Jacobs said. DECAL requires all providers participating in child care programs to be quality rated, so the agency collects data through its Quality Rated information System and uses the data to make decisions about what training providers need.

Given its experience with the child care subsidy transition, Jacobs says DECAL has learned that consolidation can be done in stages, and there are advantages to a gradual transition.

Georgia DECAL website: <http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/>

## Priorities for state agency leaders

State of Minnesota officials also suggested some priority areas that consolidation could address.

**Existing structure needs work:** Several officials agreed that the current structure creates impediments to ideal service delivery.<sup>132</sup> One agency official explained that the current structure makes local-level collaboration difficult.<sup>133</sup> Another said that even though they had reservations about consolidation, they are willing to try something new.<sup>134</sup>

Other priorities that Minnesota agency officials suggested were as followed (each one identified only once):

- Minnesota needs to better support family systems.<sup>135</sup>
- Data sharing “has a long way to go.”<sup>136</sup>
- Minnesota needs to focus on conditions that create the need for services.<sup>137</sup>
- Early childhood programs are inadequately funded.<sup>138</sup>
- There is not enough capacity to provide early childhood services.<sup>139</sup>

## Suggested benefits of consolidation for Minnesota

In its discussion groups and interviews, MAD asked participants to identify pros and cons for the different early childhood governance models—creation of a freestanding and dedicated state agency, consolidation into an existing state agency, or coordination and collaboration across more than one state agency. This section of the report presents the potential benefits that participants cited for consolidation.

### Potential benefits suggested by community stakeholders and early childhood advocates

In discussing the pros and cons of consolidating Minnesota’s early childhood programs, community stakeholders and early childhood advocates suggested almost all the reasons cited in studies and by experts for why states consider consolidation, listed in the section above (page 25)—coordination, alignment and integration, efficiency, quality, leadership, visibility and profile, equity, authority and accountability, and attention to the early childhood workforce.

In particular, many participants commented on potential efficiency gains from a consolidated early childhood department. Many saw consolidation as a way to reduce confusion, curtail bureaucracy, allow data sharing,

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<sup>132</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021; and interview with Assistant Commissioner Erin Bailey and Policy Director Stephanie Hogenson, Children’s Cabinet, State of Minnesota, November 16, 2021.

<sup>133</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>134</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Minnesota Department of Education interview, November 2021.

<sup>137</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>138</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>139</sup> Children’s Cabinet interview, November 2021.

improve service delivery, simplify access to programs, and make navigation easier across the system. “We need one new agency to be more streamlined and efficient,” an early childhood advocate said.

***“I am generally supportive of [a new, consolidated department] because I think we won’t get more money without it.” Early childhood advocate***

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Community stakeholders and early childhood advocates suggested other potential benefits from consolidation of early childhood governance at the state level, in addition to those MAD compiled from studies, reports, and interviews with a limited number of experts. Their additional ideas are summarized in the list below because they are new areas ideas within this report but should be seen only as part of a full list of potential benefits that includes those noted earlier from studies, reports, and experts consulted.

**Make a “deep difference.”** Several people cited the potential a dedicated department could have to significantly change how Minnesota addresses early childhood policy and programs. Consolidation would create a centralized area within state government for consistent attention to and advocacy for early childhood. For this, the new department would need to be built “from the ground up,” one participant said.

**Create changes at local levels.** A change in the governance structure at the state level could lead to changes, too, for how counties, school districts, and tribal nations coordinate and organize their early childhood services. A shift for state government toward a more coordinated and integrated approach could serve as a model for these other governments and lead to further improvements across the system.

***“We’ve been trying this [coordinated approach] for a while, and we’re not where we want to be. Then why not try something else?” Early childhood advocate***

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**Reduce competition for resources.** Different early childhood programs spread across separate state agencies and often with the same goals compete for funding and other resources. “I feel like creating a freestanding department is the only way we can get beyond that,” a community stakeholder said. Others, however, wondered if consolidation might lead to increased competition for resources among early childhood programs.

**Free up other agencies:** A new agency for early childhood development, care, and learning not only brings needed attention to programs and policy in this important area but frees up other agencies to focus better on their priority areas outside of early childhood. While this was cited as a benefit, others said a new agency might reduce attention to early childhood from departments where coordination would continue to be important after consolidation.

**Realize cost savings:** Under Minnesota’s current approach, related programs in different departments offer or support similar services, as is true, for example, with child care assistance. Consolidation has the potential to reduce administrative costs by closely coordinating or combining the efforts.

***“We need a direct conduit, a direct line of power. We need a commissioner who watches out for us. We need that direct voice. We need to be recognized like the Department of Education.” Community stakeholder***

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## Potential benefits suggested by State of Minnesota officials

State officials suggested the following potential benefits (each one identified only once):

- Providing all the services a family is eligible for in the same place “would be huge.”
- Consolidation can create opportunity for alignment, though it is not the only way to create a structure for that.
- A change in the governance could lead to changes in other related structures, including how the legislature organizes its approach to early childhood policy, for example.
- Consolidation may provide opportunities for public-private partnerships.
- Building the department collaboratively could create a positive culture around administration of early childhood programs.

## Uncertainty and limitations for state-level consolidation

Consolidating state-level early childhood programs into a new department or an existing one opens up opportunities related to organizational capacity, effectiveness, efficiency, leadership, and staff capabilities.<sup>140</sup> But early childhood governance studies, reports, and experts emphasize, too, the limits of what states can expect from and accomplish through consolidation.

### Uncertain impacts

The researchers MAD consulted who have studied state-level governance for early childhood programs cannot say with certainty which governance model works best or what impacts consolidation will have. This stems in part from the difficulty of comparing varied approaches across states with different circumstances. In addition, many important factors aside from governance influence effectiveness and outcomes, so states may succeed or fall short in their early childhood efforts under different governance models less so because of the model they use than because of those other factors.<sup>141</sup> Comparisons, then, are problematic. Much depends on political will, leadership, capacity, funding, knowledgeable staff and managers, and other considerations.

This uncertainty can make governance changes difficult to pursue and implement, according to Harriet Dichter, who played a lead role in changing the State of Pennsylvania approach to early learning. “Neither elected nor appointed public officials want to use their limited time and resources to press forward on governance unless they believe it will make a concrete and meaningful difference in the early learning mission....”<sup>142</sup>

Because the impacts of early childhood governance remain uncertain, the national experts that MAD consulted are reluctant to endorse one model or another. “I don’t have a preferred approach, Connors-Tadros said. “We don’t have data on a preferred approach. Is there one that is more effective? No—not in terms of the

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<sup>140</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 5.

<sup>141</sup> Bruce Atchison and Louisa Diffey, “Education Trends: Governance in Early Education,” Education Commission of the States, December 2018, 7, <https://www.ecs.org/governance-in-early-childhood-education/>.

<sup>142</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 15.

governance model alone.... It is very difficult to identify what works.” She did say, however, that consolidation may work best if the aim is improved coordination and collaboration.<sup>143</sup>

Similarly, Regenstein declined to identify any one model as best, pointing to uncertainty about the impacts of governance and varied circumstances among the states. In a 2021 presentation on early childhood governance, he noted that at present “[W]e don’t know... the best way to organize state and local governments to deliver high-quality early care and education at scale—and connect early care and education to the full range of child development services.” In an interview with MAD, Regenstein said, “I would never want to say that one is the definitive answer or not.” But, he added, “You can say there are some things that are possible with a consolidated agency.”<sup>144</sup>

***“Many informants believe that improved governance leads to improved child outcomes, but there is not presently an empirical research base showing a direct link between specific governance choices and specific child outcomes.... [S]tate leaders must understand that the relationship between their governance choices and child outcomes may be indirect and difficult to quantify. As one informant put it, good governance does not assure good outcomes, but a governance system that is well coordinated and highly functional provides the best opportunity to assure that good outcomes are being achieved for all children in the state.” Elliot Regenstein<sup>145</sup>***

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The lack of certainty about direct impacts from a change in governance, however, should not rule out states making changes, according to Regenstein. “Nothing is permanent in policy, and states can make one change and then consider possible adjustments in the future.”<sup>146</sup>

## Limits to what states can accomplish with governance

Consolidation and other changes to state-level governance are strategies, not the goal or answer when it comes to early childhood systems. To move forward on outcomes for young children, states need other changes across a range of operational and service delivery areas, including, perhaps, in rules, procedures, management approaches, staffing, funding, and leadership. Regenstein’s 2020 governance report notes that governance changes in some states moved early childhood silos closer together but left the silos in place or failed to resolve the difficulties some programs had with working together.<sup>147</sup>

There is a risk if those who are focused on early childhood governance see it as a way to avoid addressing significant and broader problems with programs, services, and systems, Regenstein said. “I would much more like to have a badly designed system that has the bodies and capacity to do the work than a well-configured

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<sup>143</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>144</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>145</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 14.

<sup>146</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 70.

<sup>147</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 65.

system that lacks the capacity to do that work.”<sup>148</sup> But, he added, there are some cases where it is hard to solve problems without a change in governance.

***“Experts overwhelmingly agree that the right governance model will differ from state to state. A change in governance is not a ‘silver bullet’ to fix all early childhood education issues within a state, but rather the structure should be seen as a strategy that state leaders can use to achieve early childhood education and care goals and develop a sustainable [early care and education] system.” New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership<sup>149</sup>***

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Regenstein offers points for states to consider when analyzing and deciding on state-level governance for early childhood programs:

- A change in structure will not solve all problems.
- While structure matters, it will not determine program results. “Functionality is what matters most.”
- A change in structure does not necessarily lead to policy alignment, so states need to be realistic about what they can achieve through a change in governance. “It could be an essential contributor, or it could be an expensive distraction.”
- Reorganizing ineffective programs will not fix those programs—something that typically involves new capacity.
- High-level political leadership from governors, legislators, and agency heads is critical for success in early childhood policy and programs.<sup>150</sup>

## **Collaboration and coordination remain critical even with consolidation**

As noted previously, a very wide range of government programs affects young children, and not all those programs will be consolidated into a state-level early childhood department or division.<sup>151</sup> For example, Medical Assistance, Minnesota’s program for the state-federal Medicaid partnership, is critically important for young children from families with a low income, but early childhood health care is one small part of that program, which as a whole would be poorly matched to an early childhood department. And often, early childhood development, care, and learning depends upon the well-being and economic stability of parents, other key adults, and families—factors affected in part by programs well outside of what states would define as early childhood initiatives.

Consequently, intentional collaboration across state departments is important under any approach to state-level governance, including consolidation.<sup>152</sup> Effective, cross-agency collaboration requires capacity within state

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<sup>148</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>149</sup> New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership, “Early Childhood Governance,” 4.

<sup>150</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 69.

<sup>151</sup> Dichter, Connors-Tadros, and Horen, “Early Childhood Governance,” 3.

<sup>152</sup> Long, “State Early Childhood Governance Structures Landscape Analysis,” 13.

government and therefore funding and staffing, but states have been reluctant to invest in it, often depending instead on occasional federal investments in state-level collaboration, according to Regenstein.<sup>153</sup>

***A danger with consolidation “is assuming that because you have an early childhood agency, you’ve solved your coordination and alignment issues, because you have not.... No matter where you put the puzzle pieces, you have to make connections.” Lori Connors-Tadros<sup>154</sup>***

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## Consolidated programs still face to political challenges

Consolidation does not necessarily shelter early childhood programs from political pressures and change. Minnesota has experienced this with its Department of Children, Youth and Families, created under Republican Governor Carlson in 1995 and dismantled under Republican Governor Pawlenty in 2003. (For more, refer to Appendix B on page 79.) When Georgia initially consolidated programs into its new DECL, the child care subsidy remained with the state’s Department of Human Services in part because moving it was not politically feasible. As politics changed, the child care subsidy was eventually shifted to DECL.<sup>155</sup> As another example, leadership turnover in Washington has fundamentally changed the scope for its Department of Children, Youth, and Families and how state officials collaborate with one another and the community.<sup>156</sup>

## Limitations, too, with the status quo

Consolidation of state-level early childhood programs involves limits and challenges, but so, too, might leaving state structures as is. A new approach to state-level governance for early childhood programs will not necessarily lead to positive results on its own, but consolidation may allow states to more easily address some problems and improve programs and services. “When you think about the costs of change, how do those compare to the cost of the status quo?” Regenstein asked.<sup>157</sup>

***“Change is difficult even when it is important and worthwhile. The state should not minimize the impact of a change on its staff or its partners—but also should not accept the status quo just because doing so seems easier.” Elliot Regenstein<sup>158</sup>***

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<sup>153</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 203.

<sup>154</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>155</sup> Jacobs interview, November 2021.

<sup>156</sup> Bohanon and Kelley interview, November 2021.

<sup>157</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>158</sup> Elliot Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance Decision Guide,” Foresight Law+Policy, June 2020, 4, [https://www.flpadvisors.com/uploads/4/2/4/2/42429949/flp\\_gtfh\\_decisionguide\\_061120.pdf](https://www.flpadvisors.com/uploads/4/2/4/2/42429949/flp_gtfh_decisionguide_061120.pdf).

## Suggested potential drawbacks to consolidation at the state level from research and experts

The list below summarizes suggested potential drawbacks to state-level consolidation of early childhood programs and systems, compiled from studies, reports, and the experts consulted.

**Governance as a diversion or distraction:** The time, energy, and resources—including funding—required to consolidate early childhood programs may shift attention away from work aimed at improving coordination, alignment, and effectiveness for those programs—or at least distract agency leadership and staff.<sup>159</sup> “I worry about change for change’s sake, rather than looking under the hood to identify what needs to happen,” Connors-Tadros said.<sup>160</sup>

**The complexity of organizational change:** The reorganization of government programs, departments, and staff is complex and may be hard to implement. Consolidation will involve changes in budgeting, IT services, financial management, contracting, reporting, licensing, compliance, and other operational areas. It requires a shift in funding and staff from one agency to another. Challenges also include change management for melding work cultures from across the combined units and their staff. In state government, major reorganizations will involve the legislature and the governor’s office and may be politically difficult to institute.<sup>161</sup> That said, a good number of states have consolidated early childhood programs in recent years.

**Impacts on coordination and integration:** One reason to consolidate early childhood programs is to improve coordination and integration across them. A reorganization likely will alter coordination patterns and may require work to re-create channels and connections.<sup>162</sup> And as noted earlier, cross-agency coordination will be necessary across programs and units that matter for early childhood but may not be part of the consolidation, even with consolidation.

**Appropriate scope:** Consolidation for early childhood efforts involves decisions about the age range that the consolidated department or division will focus on and about the state government programs and areas to include. Missteps could complicate service delivery to children and families. Recently proposed legislation in Minnesota identified birth through age four as the target range for early childhood, a range not commonly used by states with consolidated departments and divisions, based on MAD’s research.

**Services fragmented by age:** Most states house early childhood programs across different state agencies based not on age but on types of services, so, for example, education, health, and human services. Consolidating early childhood programs based on age may result in fragmented services and challenging transitions for individuals who before were able to participate in some programs across the age continuum.<sup>163</sup> Moving early childhood programs into a separate agency or division may also split those programs out from agencies that have clear

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<sup>159</sup> Robison, *State Human Services Organization*, 25.

<sup>160</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>161</sup> Cadigan, Topp, and Clothier, “Office of Early Learning,” 26 and 53.

<sup>162</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 21.

<sup>163</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 21.

focus and critical expertise on policy areas well matched to them, again, for example, education, health, and human services.<sup>164</sup> This is particularly problematic for children and youth with special health care needs, who benefit significantly from a coordinated approach across programs and agencies.<sup>165</sup>

**Provider interactions and support:** Different agencies may link to and support local service providers in different ways through different systems and using different rules. Consequently, consolidation of early childhood programs from across state agencies may involve shifts in provider engagement, oversight, support, and funding.<sup>166</sup>

**Potential costs of reorganization:** Implementation of a consolidated approach likely will impose a range of costs and require upfront resources to succeed.<sup>167</sup> Consolidation will involve short-term disruptions as staff and programs transfer to their new organizational home—disruptions that may negatively affect service availability and quality.<sup>168</sup> It may also involve long-term costs for the infrastructure needed to support a new department.<sup>169</sup>

**Less standing and influence:** One reason states pursue consolidation is to raise the visibility and profile of early childhood within state government. Still, moving early childhood programs from powerful, large state agencies into a new and smaller consolidated one might mean reduced standing and influence with legislators and within the executive branch.<sup>170</sup>

**Disruption for progress on Minnesota’s interagency coordination:** Recently, the State of Minnesota has increased coordination of early childhood efforts across agencies, especially through work carried out as part of the federal Preschool Development Grant and under the leadership of the Children’s Cabinet. Moving early childhood programs to a new department division could interrupt momentum or disrupt and damage that important development, Connors-Tadros said.<sup>171</sup>

*“What is the evidence that something needs to change?... Minnesota right now has people who are working together and building relationships, maybe because of the PDG initiative. That is very strong. They have made a lot of progress. I see Minnesota as being on a pretty good trajectory around alignment and coordination.... That would be my worry about changing up the governance structure: How much would you interrupt that trajectory that they are on.” Lori Connors-Tadros<sup>172</sup>*

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<sup>164</sup> Robison, *State Human Services Organization*, 198.

<sup>165</sup> Sharon Silow-Carroll, Diana Rodin, and Anh Pham, “Interagency, Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Care for Vulnerable Children: Lessons from Six State Initiatives,” Health Management Associates, February 2018, 1, [https://lpfch.org/sites/default/files/field/publications/hma\\_interagency\\_collaboration\\_national\\_report\\_1.23.18.pdf](https://lpfch.org/sites/default/files/field/publications/hma_interagency_collaboration_national_report_1.23.18.pdf).

<sup>166</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 21.

<sup>167</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 6.

<sup>168</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 20; and Robison, *State Human Services Organization*, 25.

<sup>169</sup> Cadigan, Topp, and Clothier, “Office of Early Learning,” 25.

<sup>170</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 20.

<sup>171</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>172</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

**Additional considerations for consolidation into an existing agency:** As is true for the potential benefits of consolidation, reorganizing early childhood programs within an existing state agency may involve several other potential drawbacks, beyond those listed above for consolidation in general. One is that early childhood will be one of several priorities within the agency where consolidation occurs and will need to compete with those other priorities for attention and resources.<sup>173</sup> It may be the case, too, that the array of early childhood programs moved into the existing agency will be seen as not central to the agency’s mission and therefore less important. And an existing agency may have limited experience dealing with a mixed service delivery model that taps both private- and public-sector providers—the model used for child care.<sup>174</sup>

## Concerns about consolidation of early childhood programs for Minnesota

The community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and Minnesota officials who participated in MAD’s discussion groups and interviews offered concerns about consolidation in response to MAD’s questions about pros and cons. As noted before, MAD sought comments on the potential benefits and drawbacks to consolidation from all participants, regardless of whether they favored consolidation, opposed it, or had mixed reactions to it.

### Potential issues with a change in governance suggested by community stakeholders and early childhood advocates

When discussing potential concerns about consolidation of early childhood programs, many community stakeholders and early childhood advocates raised points covered above in this report’s sections on the uncertainties, limitations, and drawbacks identified from studies, reports, and interviews with experts (pages 46 and 50). For the section below on drawbacks offered by the stakeholders and advocates, MAD focused on new ideas. But because a few of the topics noted earlier drew significant attention from the stakeholders and advocates who were consulted, some of what MAD presents here touches on the themes covered previously.

#### Focus on other early childhood challenges, not governance

Some community stakeholders and early childhood advocates maintained that a change in governance will not address top concerns for early childhood programs and policy at the state level and that the state should work on those important issues instead of organizational structure.

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<sup>173</sup> Cadigan, Topp, and Clothier, “Office of Early Learning,” 23, 51.

<sup>174</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “A Framework for Choosing,” 20.

***“One of the things I have seen and experienced is that combining systems so that they appear to synthesize for efficiency doesn’t always work well, and it takes too long to find that it doesn’t work.... I would not encourage government to look at how it could rearrange the chairs on the Titanic.” Community stakeholder***

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These individuals saw little connection between consolidation and their interest in improved programs, better access to services, more funding, equity, data sharing, a unified application process, and other steps needed to make participation easier for families. They suggested the state could address these areas without a change in governance. “Focus on solving problems and making changes that will make it easier for the clients,” a community stakeholder said. But another community stakeholder who doubted a change in governance would resolve key issues also did not want to rule it out as an option. “I think we need to try something, and if we fail, we learn from it.”

Some emphasized that increased funding and resources will matter more than the governance structure. There was concern that a focus on governance would create the misperception that a better organizational structure and resulting improvements in efficiency will address needs in the early childhood system when in fact Minnesota needs both new approaches and more funding, staff, and local infrastructure for service delivery. “If you put all the focus on restructuring, there may be focus lost on bringing more finances to this area and bringing badly needed policy changes,” an early childhood advocate said. However, she also noted that a change in governance might make the gap in needed funds and resources more obvious.

Regenstein, the national expert on governance, said he is not surprised that some involved in early childhood service delivery at the local level fail to see the relevance of changes in state-level governance for programs and policy. “And there will be other people who will think that governance is the only obstacle to Minnesota’s goals.” Both perspectives can cite examples to support their views, he said.<sup>175</sup>

### **The right scope**

While MAD did not ask community stakeholders and early childhood advocates about scope for a consolidated department or division of early childhood, a number of them brought this up as a concern. They pointed to the age range as important, noting that some define early childhood as ages birth through five and others birth through eight. A stakeholder pointed out that one of Minnesota’s central early childhood offerings—the Child Care Assistance Program—covers children through ages 13 or 15 under certain circumstances. A few questioned the birth-through-four focus of the 2021 legislative proposal to establish a department of early childhood. “What is age four?” one advocate asked. Several also cited the need to consider scope for programs and policies to be consolidated into a dedicated early childhood department or division, with a few suggesting consolidation would provide the opportunity to expand into new areas such as family leave.

### **Minnesota’s whole family approach**

In Minnesota and elsewhere, the emphasis for early childhood policies and programs has moved from a focus solely on the child to broader attention for the needs of the whole family system across a range of challenges

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<sup>175</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

and opportunities. As noted previously, this whole family approach recognizes that well-being of children depends to a great extent on the well-being of the broader family unit, including the parents or other key adults in children’s lives. Programs that are important to early childhood but are not appropriately defined as early childhood programs include the MFIP, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, to cite just a few.

***“Whole Family Approach means putting a thriving family—including both parent and child—at the center of efforts: education, post-secondary and career pathways, economic assets, health, and well-being.” Children’s Cabinet.<sup>176</sup>***

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Several community stakeholders and early childhood advocates expressed concern that by separating out early childhood programs, the State of Minnesota would make links to broader family services more difficult. To address that, “I would be interested in thinking about a department of children, youth, and families,” one advocate said. A community stakeholder interested in the whole family approach, however, said Minnesota might still be able to carry out this broader policy stance with a standalone early childhood department if that department embedded the whole family into its philosophy and norms.

### **Other potential drawbacks suggested by community stakeholders and early childhood advocates**

In discussing the pros and cons of consolidating Minnesota’s early childhood programs, community stakeholders and early childhood advocates suggested all the potential drawbacks cited in studies and by experts and listed in the section above (page 50)—governance as a diversion, the complexity of organizational change, impacts on coordination and integration, appropriate scope, services fragmented by age, potential costs of reorganization, less standing and influence, and disruption of progress on Minnesota’s interagency coordination.

Community stakeholders and early childhood advocates suggested other potential drawbacks to consolidation at the state level, in addition to those MAD compiled from studies and interviews with a limited number of experts. Their additional ideas are summarized in the list below because they are new but should be seen only as part of a full list of potential drawbacks that includes those noted in studies and reports and cited by experts.

**Unworkable?** Several community stakeholders questioned whether the state could successfully consolidate the wide range of early childhood programs from across existing state agencies—an immense task. “I don’t know if that’s workable,” one said. However, other states have combined early childhood programs into dedicated departments or divisions.

***“I think consolidation is a lofty dream, but I think it’s difficult to make it work in reality.”***  
***Community stakeholder***

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**Misplaced emphasis on cost savings:** Consolidation should not be framed as a way to lower the state’s costs for early childhood efforts through increased efficiencies and cuts in programs and staffing, although both efficiency gains and reduced duplication are seen as potential benefits. The state should commit to more funding,

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<sup>176</sup> The Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, “Executive Practices for a Child-Centered Government,” no date, 2.

increased resources, and better programs and services for children and families, regardless of decisions about consolidation, an early childhood advocate said.

***“This is not a change to be made to create more efficiencies and economies of scale. It’s not a change to cut funding.” Early childhood advocate***

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**Agencies pull back from early childhood:** If Minnesota consolidates early childhood programs into a new department or division, other state departments will still need to collaborate and coordinate on important and broad elements of well-being for children and their families. Some worry that a new early childhood department may lead other departments to view early childhood as an area reserved for that new department and no longer significant to their work. “Move [early childhood] into one department and that further demotes it to a side issue or one department’s issue,” an advocate said.

**Competition and cuts:** If the state moves early childhood programs from across departments into a new department or division, those programs may be forced to compete for funds and resources. And similar programs might be combined or cut, potentially eliminating some with important distinctions and targeted services. However, others thought consolidation could reduce competition.

**Challenges for local providers:** A new early childhood department or division could address fragmentation and coordination issues for local governments, tribal nations, and other services providers, or it could make matters worse, particularly for public agencies in smaller rural counties with limited staff. “We have so many different services and eligibility requirements, and I could see that adding another department at the state could make things even more complex,” a community stakeholder said.

***“I don’t want to lose the pieces we already have in place if early childhood goes into one agency.” Early childhood advocate***

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**Additional concerns for consolidation into an existing state agency:** Community stakeholders and early childhood advocates cited several concerns specific to the consolidation of early childhood programs into an existing state agency, beyond those cited earlier from governance studies, reports, and experts. One advocate worried that placement of programs within an existing department would hinder innovation, compared to what would be possible with the creation of a new department. This same advocate thought consolidation within an existing agency might not be enough of a change in governance for what Minnesota needs. As a difficulty rather than a drawback, several stakeholders and advocates said it would be hard to determine whether a consolidated early childhood division should be housed within MDE or DHS based both on fit for the early childhood issue areas and any department’s capacity to absorb the new unit.

## **State of Minnesota officials’ concerns about consolidating programs**

State of Minnesota officials who participated in MAD interviews and discussions suggested areas of concern with consolidation of early childhood programs, including the themes and drawbacks noted below.

## Impacts on outcomes will require more than a change in governance

Minnesota agency officials in most interviews voiced concern that changing the governance structure was not going to help Minnesota move the needle on early childhood outcomes. Many of them pointed to disjointed and misaligned funding streams, different eligibility requirements, and varied levels of support—some of which stems from how the state legislature has structured, for example, multiple child care and learning programs that do not align and would not with consolidation barring legislative action. Others pointed to a lack of funding and capacity for early childhood efforts and said that funding for a new agency would be better spent providing services to young children and their families.

Participants in most of MAD’s interviews with Minnesota officials noted that governance changes alone will not solve the major challenges for the early childhood system, particularly those related to service delivery. MDH officials said improved local coordination—at the level where families interact with the system—would do more than a state-level governance change to improve the experiences of program participants. Officials from MDH and MDE noted that agencies operate differently because they have different focal points. “We should be looking at how to align our structure so that what’s unique about our agencies should be unique, and what is the same between us is the same,” said MDE Commissioner Heather Mueller. “It’s just a matter of operating differently.”<sup>177</sup> The officials also noted that the challenges of interagency coordination are not unique to early childhood.<sup>178</sup>

## Concerns about consolidation for some programs

Nearly all interviews with State of Minnesota officials included concerns about what the scope of a consolidated early childhood department or agency should be. In several cases, early childhood programs are related to other programs embedded by federal policy in their current agency. For example, IDEA Part B provides special education to children and young adults with developmental disabilities ages three through 21, and the federal government requires that the program reside in the state’s education agency.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, an agency specific to early childhood would not be able to include IDEA Part B services for young children. And if that agency housed IDEA Part C early intervention services for children ages birth to three, that would split Part C from Part B. Similar federal rules keep the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children at MDH. The Child Care Assistance Program uses the database of the state’s Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program, so CCAP data would still reside at DHS even if CCAP moved to an early childhood department, necessitating a data sharing agreement. A few officials were also concerned in general that physical health, behavioral health, and special education have not been given enough consideration in consolidation discussions.

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<sup>177</sup> Commissioner Heather Mueller and Assistant Commissioner Bobbie Burnham, Minnesota Department of Education, interview with MAD, November 17, 2021.

<sup>178</sup> Minnesota Department of Education interview, November 2021.

<sup>179</sup> Under the code of federal regulations (34 CFR § 300.41), “State educational agency or SEA means the State board of education or other agency or officer primarily responsible for the State supervision of public elementary schools and secondary schools, or, if there is no such officer or agency, an officer or agency designated by the Governor or by State law.”

## Worries about consolidation’s impact on Minnesota’s whole family approach

When asked about how consolidation could affect Minnesota’s whole family approach, many agency officials worried that focusing narrowly on early childhood would undo a lot of work agencies have done to become family-centered in the broad sense. For example, DHS has worked to streamline eligibility for many of its programs, including Medical Assistance, MFIP, and CCAP. Removing CCAP from DHS could reintroduce complications for families seeking services. As Commissioner Jodi Harpstead of DHS said, “You squeeze the balloon one place and it comes out somewhere else, and you spent tax payer dollars to squeeze into that spot.”<sup>180</sup> In terms of Family Home Visiting for infants and children, consolidating all those services may appear to simplify things for families, but it could also dilute MDH’s current focus on the whole family and holistic health, state officials said.

*“Little people have older people connected to them.” State of Minnesota official<sup>181</sup>*

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## Other potential drawbacks suggested by State of Minnesota officials

**Misplaced emphasis on cost savings.** A few Minnesota agency officials cautioned that creating efficiency should not be a focus for actions to improve the early childhood system.

**Other agencies would pull back from early childhood.** Several officials voiced concern that if Minnesota created a department dedicated to early childhood, other agencies would focus their limited resources on other populations, rather than maintaining their current commitment to early childhood. Families with young children often first seek services like housing, food assistance, or health care. If those programs were to separate from early childhood programs, it might be harder for families to learn about or access early childhood services.

**Competition and cuts:** A few Minnesota officials said reorganization would lead to competition for limited resources among agencies, programs, and staff. The need to pursue other funding streams could detract attention and resources from the shared goal of improving early childhood service delivery. This could also happen at the local level.

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<sup>180</sup> Interview with Commissioner Jodi Harpstead and Deputy Commissioner Nikki Farago, Minnesota Department of Human Services, November 12, 2021.

<sup>181</sup> Discussion with directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

## Case Summary: Colorado

In spring 2021, the Colorado Legislature created the Department of Early Childhood, which is expected to launch in July 2022. Colorado voters also passed a new nicotine tax, a large portion of which will be dedicated to early childhood programs. The Early Childhood Leadership Commission, Colorado's state early childhood advisory council, has been explicit that the new department is to address all things related to early childhood, not just early childhood education, in accordance with its Early Childhood Colorado Framework.<sup>182</sup>

As in Minnesota, many services in Colorado are administered at the county level. The state has two tribes, 64 counties, over 300 early childhood councils, and more than 160 school districts. State officials explained that one thing weighing heavily on their minds is how to equitably disburse funds without adding another layer of bureaucracy. The biggest challenge identified at the local level is integrating new ways of providing services, such as home-based preschool, with existing services, all in a way that "preserves family choice and layers with school district values like inclusive classrooms," said Kristin Heyl, Early Childhood Leadership Commission Director for the State of Colorado. According to Heyl, community providers are excited for the opportunity to elevate the important work they do and have been strong partners. Conversely, uncertainty about how resources will be allocated has school districts concerned about funding they depend on. The State is also providing infrastructure and resources so that local entities can focus on providing services, rather than covering administrative costs.

An ongoing challenge for Colorado is untangling conflicting legislation at the state and local level in regard to IDEA Part B Special Education. Colorado's consolidation legislation states that there will be one early childhood agency, but the federal government mandates that Part B must reside within a state's education agency. Colorado is currently working to determine how to ensure special education is connected with all other early childhood programs without creating excess bureaucracy, duplicating services, or having two separate systems.

Colorado state officials credit the state's work on PDG with laying the groundwork that made the new state agency and tax funding possible.

Colorado's Department of Early Childhood Transition Plan: <https://coloradonewslines.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Final-Department-of-Early-Childhood-Transition-Report-11-1-2021.pdf>.

### **Challenges for counties, school districts, tribal governments, local public health agencies, and other providers:**

Many State of Minnesota officials expressed concern that a change in governance structure would create complications for providers. A new structure could mean that providers would have to cultivate new relationships, which would create inefficiencies at least in the short term as providers adjust to different ways of operating, based on the new structure and new relationships. The need for new relationships may also negate progress made with existing relationships. For example, the education community has worked diligently to

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<sup>182</sup>"Early Childhood Colorado Framework," updated July 2015, [ECLC-FRMWRK-062415-LORES \(earlychildhoodframework.org\)](http://earlychildhoodframework.org).

develop relationships at the local level to address apprehension over voluntary preschool, and a new agency might need to rebuild those relationships from scratch. Officials also noted that local governments might not have the resources for the level of coordination a new governance structure could require.

**Current capacity:** Officials also expressed concern that staff do not have the capacity they would need to dedicate to a reorganization after working tirelessly to address the COVID-19 pandemic. They suggested that consolidation might be better received at a different time.

## Coordination of early childhood programs across more than one state agency

Nationwide, about half the states coordinate their early childhood efforts across multiple agencies, rather than depending upon an agency dedicated to early childhood or an early childhood division within a broader agency. Coordination strategies vary from state to state. Some states simply stress interagency coordination as an important goal. Other states use memorandums of understanding, declarations of agreement, joint powers agreements, or other formal interagency arrangements to clarify responsibilities, coordinate activities, and address funding details. Some states, too, establish formal early childhood offices in specific departments or under the governor to work on interagency coordination and alignment. A number of states depend for coordination on their children’s cabinets or the early childhood advisory councils required of states under the federal Head Start program.<sup>183</sup>

*“The first efforts to move away from fragmentation were focused on coordination among programs.... This approach was successful in alleviating some of the fragmentation of the early care and education field, particularly the fragmentation caused by multiple funding streams created by local, state, and federal governmental agencies.” Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services<sup>184</sup>*

As noted previously, Minnesota currently strives for coordination of early childhood programs across different departments, notably MDE, MDH, and DHS but also the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Department of Transportation, the Housing Finance Agency, and others. While the state has no formal office to coordinate among the agencies, there was an Office of Early Learning within the Minnesota Department of Education from the early to mid-2010s charged, in part, with aligning support across agencies for child development from the prenatal stage through grade three.<sup>185</sup> Minnesota’s Children’s Cabinet, re-launched in the 2010s and more active since then, plays an important coordinating role.

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<sup>183</sup> Atchison and Diffey, “Education Trends,” 5–6.

<sup>184</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 4.

<sup>185</sup> Office of Early Learning, presentation to the Minnesota Legislature.

## Benefits cited for interagency coordination by research and experts

MAD conducted research into coordination across agencies for state-level governance of early childhood policy and programs, again drawing from studies, reports, and a limited number of interviews with early childhood governance experts. The list below summarizes suggested potential benefits of the coordinated approach.

**Commitment to coordination:** Drawbacks with early childhood programs and systems spread across different agencies led states to emphasize coordination to improve information sharing, efficiency, and alignment. A commitment to coordination at the state level can reduce some fragmentation and yield benefits.<sup>186</sup>

*“Coordination is the current model in most states, but in some states the ‘coordination’ title is more aspirational than descriptive.” Elliot Regenstein<sup>187</sup>*

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**Existing structures and lower costs:** States that continue to coordinate across agencies keep current structures in place and build on them, Connors-Tadros said. They avoid the cost, effort, and disruption required to dismantle and reorganize current structures to create a new one.<sup>188</sup>

**Ties to agency policy focus:** By housing early childhood services in the agencies focused on education, health, and human services, states benefit from easier coordination and some coherence with other programs in those policy areas but not focused exclusively on early childhood, Connors-Tadros said.<sup>189</sup> In this case, early childhood programs link to the broad policy purposes of the agencies, rather than the age range for program participants.

**Better match with federal funding streams:** A significant share of the state-level work on early childhood depends on funding from different federal agencies and divisions, often targeted toward different departments at the state level, Connors-Tadros noted. This can lead states to emphasize coordination of early childhood programs across those state departments.<sup>190</sup>

## Additional suggested benefits from formal offices for interagency coordination

The research and the experts point to potential advantages for states that use formal offices to coordinate early childhood programs across departments. The following are possible benefits that MAD identified for formal state coordinating offices. Some of these echo the reasons noted above for pursuing consolidation of early childhood programs into a dedicated agency:

- Provides state with an identifiable office dedicated to early childhood

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<sup>186</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 4.

<sup>187</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 181.

<sup>188</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>189</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>190</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

- Boosts awareness of early childhood as an important area for state policy and programming
- Creates a single point of contact for providers, organizations, and community groups focused on early childhood
- Increases accountability for successful program implementation and program quality
- May be placed within a state agency to take advantage of existing agency infrastructure for operations<sup>191</sup>

## Suggested benefits and potential benefits of the coordinated approach for Minnesota

As time allowed, MAD sought comments from participants in group discussions and interviews with community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and State of Minnesota officials on the pros and cons of the coordinated approach to state-level early childhood governance. Because of time constraints, far fewer participants in these conversations talked about the coordinated approach, compared to consolidation.

### Benefits of Minnesota’s coordinated approach suggested by community stakeholders and early childhood advocates

The stakeholders and advocates who cited benefits to the coordinated approach echoed the research and experts on two of the four points listed in the section above (page 60)—use of existing structures and resulting lower costs, and links to the policy focus of the different departments that house early childhood programs. In addition, one community stakeholder said that with multiple agencies engaged in early childhood efforts, one agency can step in to fill voids if another agency is facing capacity constraints.

*“I would hate to see us spend resources and time to build an agency.... when we could probably be using those resources to do quality improvements in the structure we have.”*  
*Community stakeholder*

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### Benefits of a coordinated approach suggested by State of Minnesota officials

Officials at MDE, MDH, and DHS offered the following ideas about advantages to Minnesota’s coordinated approach:

**Importance of coordination:** A few State of Minnesota officials described the commitment by agencies to collaboration and coordination as key to making the current system work. They highlighted improved collaboration among agencies in recent years as a result of PDG work and efforts by the Children’s Cabinet.

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<sup>191</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 19; and Cadigan, Topp, and Clothier, “Office of Early Learning,” 52–53.

*“I’ve been in state government for 12 years. I’ve seen us go [away] from an isolated, siloed approach. In last four to five years, there have been some opportunities in federal and state grants to really reevaluate how we can work better across state agencies in order to serve the whole family approach.” State of Minnesota official<sup>192</sup>*

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**Existing approach:** Several Minnesota officials highlighted elements of the existing structure that are functioning well. For example, they said the Children’s Cabinet has been a great interagency convener—looking beyond the narrow scope of early childhood to topics like housing and food security.

**Policy areas as a focus:** Several officials also noted that early childhood programs benefit from their agencies’ respective focus areas. For example, DHS, with its broad range of human services, has streamlined eligibility across its programs and focused more holistically on the needs of the whole family. MDH’s Family Home Visiting program benefits from public health’s focus on health and well-being. At MDE, strong ties to K-12 education provide opportunities to align preschool education with expectations for kindergarten.

**Funding streams:** One State of Minnesota official said it works best to organize government based on funding streams.

## Suggested disadvantages for the coordinated approach from research and experts

From research studies, reports, and interviews with the experts consulted, MAD compiled the list below of concerns and disadvantages to a coordinated approach to state-level governance of early childhood policy and programs across multiple state agencies.

**Less visibility for early childhood:** Early childhood programs are spread out and not as evident to policy makers and the public, perhaps resulting in less attention and fewer resources for this important area within state government.<sup>193</sup> Support for state early childhood efforts may be fragmented because advocates must focus on programs within different departments rather than concentrate their efforts on one department with the array of early childhood initiatives.<sup>194</sup>

**Diverse priorities and goals:** Differences among agencies on goals and focus may lead to conflict over priorities for coordinating early childhood efforts.<sup>195</sup>

**Coordination as a lower priority:** Informal, interagency coordination—executed without a formal early childhood office—depends on the willingness and capacity of busy division heads and program managers, who may lack the time and resources necessary to drive collaboration and coherence across departments.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>Minnesota Department of Education interview, November 2021.

<sup>193</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>194</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 18.

<sup>195</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 18.

<sup>196</sup> State Capacity Building Center, “State Early Childhood Systems,” 5, 14.

Coordination can lead to positive, incremental change, but “the ceiling on that is still lower than what it is when you bring it into one agency,” Regenstein said.

**Hard to sustain:** State government priorities may shift away from coordination for early childhood programs or away from early childhood itself as a focus. Consequently, even successful coordination efforts may falter over time or with a change in executive branch administration.<sup>197</sup>

**Siloed programming and funding:** Work can become siloed in the agencies and their divisions, as can program funding. The separation of programs among departments means those who coordinate interagency efforts likely face inefficiencies, inconsistencies, duplication, and data sharing problems.<sup>198</sup>

**Slow, difficult decision-making:** Coordinated decisions for early childhood are difficult to secure when programs, responsibilities, and authority are split across state agencies. If reached, they likely will take time and require consensus.<sup>199</sup> Decision-making is hard even with a formal early childhood office charged with coordination across agencies because each agency involved has authority and there may be no authority for cross-agency action.<sup>200</sup>

**No clear accountability:** No one department or leader is responsible for early childhood as an area for state government policy and programming.<sup>201</sup>

**Trouble tracking budgets, funding:** The total budget levels and funding for state early childhood programs is difficult to identify and track under a coordinated approach given that the array of efforts is distributed widely across different departments and divisions.<sup>202</sup>

**Needs dedicated staff with authority:** The coordinated approach to state-level governance is unlikely to succeed without staff responsible for this work, Connors-Tadros said. Staff need the authority to make it happen and accountability for their progress. Maybe that can happen without a coordinating office but maybe it requires one, she said.<sup>203</sup>

***“The only way it works is if there are staff that are focused on coordination and alignment. You need to have that clear charge for coordination and alignment to address this... I don’t actually think it can be done without a formal role around coordination.... It’s all about having the appropriate and necessary staffing and capacity, funding and authority, and clarity about functions and roles.” Lori Connors-Tadros<sup>204</sup>***

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<sup>197</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 14.

<sup>198</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 14, 18.

<sup>199</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 18.

<sup>200</sup> Regenstein, “Early Childhood Governance,” 55.

<sup>201</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 18.

<sup>202</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 18.

<sup>203</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

<sup>204</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

## Additional issues with formal offices for interagency coordination

The research and the experts consulted also note disadvantages for states that use formal offices to coordinate early childhood programs across departments. The following are potential drawbacks for state early childhood offices charged with interagency coordination:

- Will require funding, staffing, and other resources to set up, but less so than a new early childhood department.
- May have responsibility for coordination but lack the authority to compel the agencies to coordinate.
- Creates another layer of governance, perhaps adding to bureaucratic challenges.

## Thoughts on the coordinated approach for Minnesota from community stakeholders and early childhood advocates

The community stakeholders and early childhood advocates who talked about drawbacks for the coordinated approach in Minnesota cited some of the same points raised in the studies, reports, and expert interviews—less visibility for early childhood efforts, coordination as a lower priority, and the difficulty sustaining coordination over time. Commenting on Minnesota’s current approach, several stakeholder and advocates suggested coordination might be more successful and sustainable if the state used a formal office to carry it out.<sup>205</sup>

## Ideas from State of Minnesota officials on alternatives to consolidation

While Minnesota agency officials noted numerous concerns regarding consolidation, they agreed that change is necessary. They provided the suggestions and alternatives below as ways to improve state-level governance for early childhood programs without the disruption a full reorganization would cause.

***“Consolidation might not be what I think would be a solution, but I am willing to try something new.” State of Minnesota official<sup>206</sup>***

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Minnesota officials noted that there is no one correct way to structure early childhood governance. To truly improve outcomes for young children, “you need to look at the policies and legislation that created those inefficiencies and complexities, and you don’t have to be in the same location (agency) to do that work,” one official said.<sup>207</sup>

What Minnesota should determine, according to state officials, is how people whose work relates to state-level early childhood programs can most effectively engage with one another. Minnesota should determine what

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<sup>205</sup> Regenstein and Lipper, “Framework for Choosing,” 18.

<sup>206</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>207</sup> Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

changes in operations would foster better alignment across departments. The state should also identify what specific goals it needs to accomplish and determine what structure can best support those goals. One official suggested the right structure is a mix of interagency coordination and potential intra-agency consolidation. Another said the right structure allows for leadership and innovation at the state level.

Several of State of Minnesota officials suggested that, rather than consolidating, the state should rethink how it structures interagency partnerships. They envisioned a centralized early childhood fund that would be used across agencies. Staff would remain in their respective agencies but would charge to the early childhood fund code for collaborative work. Officials brainstormed the following potential work areas for a centralized interagency early childhood team:

- Project management
- Grants and contract management
- Budget management
- Development of a system of shared practices<sup>208</sup>

Officials also identified qualities of a well-aligned and effective structure:

- Staff dedicated to interagency coordination
- Fully funded programs
- A single cabinet-level voice for early childhood

Finally, several Minnesota officials mentioned that what happens at the provider or local level has a stronger impact on the family experience than any state-level structure. To improve the family experience, Minnesota should foster effective collaboration and alignment at the local level. This matches with South Carolina's strategy to "strengthen and align local service delivery systems" toward the goal of sustaining its coordinated approach to early childhood programs.<sup>209</sup> South Carolina's strategic plan also calls for strengthening parent leadership using the existing infrastructure.<sup>210</sup>

## The Governor's Children's Cabinet

A number of the community stakeholders and early childhood advocates made comments about the Children's Cabinet—the value of its work, the limits to what it does or can do, and its role in governance going forward. None of MAD's discussion and interview questions asked specifically about the Children's Cabinet, but perhaps a dozen or more of those who spoke with MAD talked about the cabinet.

Several stakeholders and advocates suggested that the Children's Cabinet might carry out more formal coordination among state agencies. The cabinet already has built strong connections to the heads and other top leaders at agencies that offer early childhood programs or conduct work that affects young children, a

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<sup>208</sup>Discussion with state government directors and leaders for PDG, November 2021.

<sup>209</sup> South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council, "For Our Future: South Carolina's Birth through Five Plan," October 2021, <https://earlychildhoodsc.org/media/r0qd5a1p/sc-birth-through-five-plan-draft.pdf>

<sup>210</sup> South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council, "For Our Future: South Carolina's Birth through Five Plan."

community stakeholder said. State government needs more formal coordination. “Does that mean forming another office? Maybe. But maybe they do that piece.”

***“I wonder if there would be a way for [the Children’s Cabinet] to take on more visibility and more connection to local programs and to what families are needing.... They are so focused on policy, which is important. Could they change the role to have a little more coordination and oversight of practice and policy?” Community stakeholder***

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Another stakeholder commended the Children’s Cabinet for its work with family child care providers, calling the cabinet’s efforts “amazing.” She had been unaware of the cabinet until the COVID-19 pandemic, when its cross-agency role became more obvious and more important, at least for some providers.

While recognizing its efforts, some stakeholders and advocates noted limits for the Children’s Cabinet. Its involvement in early childhood governance is not very clear to some, and for people working on early childhood at the local level, it is difficult “to know what their role is,” a stakeholder said. One of the advocates said coordination now by the cabinet is working but depends upon painstaking relationship building and lacks a clear decision-making process. “I think it is very, very hard to reach... decisions,” the advocate said. “I don’t think the result is often satisfaction with the decisions that are reached.”

Others commented that the Children’s Cabinet is focused on policy at a higher level and less connected with those at the community level who deliver early childhood services—likely by design. Consequently, community partners do not necessarily recognize the cabinet as a key player and connect with it for help when it comes to early childhood programs across the departments.

Several people noted that the Children’s Cabinet is under-resourced, lacking both the staff and capacity to deal with the many early childhood programs across all of state government. The state cannot depend on the Children’s Cabinet to foster collaboration and coordination across state agencies without the sufficient staff to do that, some said.

The Children’s Cabinet is very active and useful now, but its role may not be sustainable, particularly where there is a change in governors. “It’s not durable,” an advocate said. “As soon as the governor changes, then whatever was there is gone or is pretty close to gone.”

Minnesota needs an entity within state government to better coordinate early childhood efforts across the agencies, a provider said. If not the Children’s Cabinet, then some other unit is needed to “hold the bigger vision” for early childhood policy and programs for state government.

## Impacts of consolidation for Minnesota

The 2021 session law mandating this governance report requires attention to the impacts of consolidation on five specific areas:

- “state efforts to ensure that all Minnesota children are kindergarten-ready, with race, income, and zip code no longer predictors of school readiness;

- coordination and alignment among programs;
- the effort required of families to receive services to which they are entitled;
- the effort required of service providers to participate in childhood programs; and
- the articulation between early care and education programs and the kindergarten through grade 12 system.”<sup>211</sup>

MAD discussed specific impacts from consolidation on these five areas as part of its limited number of interviews with early childhood governance experts and early childhood advocates. Due to time constraints, MAD focused on other areas for questions posed to discussion groups of community stakeholders and early childhood advocates. That broader group of stakeholders and advocates, however, touch on most of these points when discussing potential benefits of consolidation, with their comments captured in previous sections of this report. In particular, they talked about the potential for better coordination and alignment among programs, and reduced fragmentation and administrative challenges for families and providers participating in early childhood programs.

Connors-Tadros at the National Institute for Early Education Research said it would be difficult to know how consolidation will affect these five areas of interest from the legislature because impacts involve factors beyond governance, making it hard to isolate the effects of governance alone. “You’re not going to know direct effects of consolidation,” she said. A change in governance might be “necessary but not sufficient,” she added. For example, the effort required of families and providers to participate in early childhood programs will be affected by investments in technology for coordinated eligibility and enrollment, which should have a positive impact regardless of governance. Overall, governance is needed, but states can address that technology issue without creating a new governance structure, she said. If Minnesota hopes to address these five areas through a change in governance, the state should set these areas as its goals and then design governance functions and capacities around them.<sup>212</sup>

Several of the early childhood advocates also noted difficulties in tying consolidation directly to the impacts on the five points included in session law. “We just don’t have the infrastructure to know the answers to these questions,” one said. Impacts depend more on the budget, another said. Another advocate said, “I am not aware of any studies that show the impacts of consolidation on kindergarten readiness. That would be a very interesting study to do, and very tricky.”

***“[Consolidation] has the potential to improve the coordination, but I don’t think it’s a given.... There has to be a commitment that it is going to increase alignment and coordination, but that has to be an internal commitment and there have to be resources for it. We cannot know that we’re not going to fall into the same traps.” Early childhood advocate***

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<sup>211</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 2021, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 7, article 14, section 22, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2021/1/Session+Law/Chapter/7/>.

<sup>212</sup> Connors-Tadros interview, November 2021.

Regenstein also said the direct benefits from consolidation can be hard to discern. “It’s not as clear-cut as what a legislature might be looking for.”<sup>213</sup> But Regenstein and several of the early childhood advocates MAD interviewed did comment on the likelihood of impacts for each of the specific areas cited in the session law.

**Kindergarten readiness, regardless of race, income, and zip code:** Here, Regenstein said, states “cannot draw a straight line” to governance for impacts based on existing research. “You can’t say definitely what impact that will have.” However, he noted, a lack of evidence for impacts in the research does not mean a change in governance won’t affect readiness, just that researchers are not able to measure or predict it.<sup>214</sup>

**Coordination and alignment:** Successful coordination and alignment are “much more possible” in states that have consolidated core, state-level programs for children and families, Regenstein said. And successful coordination efforts positively affect families seeking early childhood services. While consolidation is no guarantee for improved coordination and alignment, it creates possibilities for improvement, he said.<sup>215</sup>

**Effort required of families:** Successful coordination efforts may positively affect families seeking early childhood services, reducing the time and effort required. A fragmented early childhood system places burdens on participants. “For families with young children, the burden shouldn’t be on them,” Regenstein said. One of the advocates echoed this point about consolidation, saying one central department in state government for early childhood services makes it easier for families, especially if it leads to alignment on program eligibility.

**Effort required of providers:** While not automatic, consolidation “absolutely can have an impact on this,” Regenstein said. Service providers at the local and regional levels are crucial partners for state governments, so states need to determine how a shift in governance will affect them, he said. Consolidation may mean changes in regulations and a decrease in cases where services are offered with little or no ties to similar services. In terms of consolidation’s impacts on providers, one of the advocates said, “It gives them a central place to be in collaboration with agencies.”

**Articulation between early childhood programs and the K-12 system:** One of the advocates said consolidation could improve services to families and in this way help prepare children for the K-12 system. Regenstein said states should view early learning as critically important to educational success for students in school, but K-12 systems too often have seen early learning as outside their scope and not central to their work. Consolidation of early childhood programs into state departments of education have had mixed results, he said. States have had mixed results, too, with consolidation into freestanding, dedicated departments when it comes to integrating early learning and the K-12 school system. “It is... the case that regardless of what configuration you end up with, some of the work is about making the leaders of K-12 recognize the importance of early childhood,” he said.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>214</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>215</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

<sup>216</sup> Regenstein interview, November 2021.

# How well or poorly is Minnesota’s current state-level governance structure working?

MAD gathered comments from community stakeholders, early childhood advocates, and State of Minnesota officials about strengths and weaknesses of the current, state-level approach to early childhood programs and services. MAD asked stakeholders and advocates how well or poorly the state’s governance structure is working. In interviews and discussions with State of Minnesota officials, MAD asked what the state is doing well in terms of administering and governing early childhood programs and where the state needs to make the greatest strides.

## Some strengths of Minnesota’s approach

Interest in a state-level governance change for early childhood programs in Minnesota stems from a desire to improve the state’s early childhood systems. The sources MAD used for this governance report noted many challenges with the state’s current approach, but they cited some positives as well. For example, a document compiled for Minnesota’s federal Preschool Development Grant award in 2019 cites the role and work of the Children’s Cabinet to “coordinate policies, programs, and resources across agencies and communities to support improved outcomes for Minnesota’s children.” As noted earlier, the cabinet has focused on improving interagency coordination and communication, advancing policies across the range of areas important to early childhood, and increasing access for all children to services.<sup>217</sup> In 2018, the national Bipartisan Policy Center ranked Minnesota among the top 20 states for integrated early care and education.<sup>218</sup>

When MAD asked participants in discussion groups what Minnesota has done well, several community stakeholders and early childhood advocates noted recently improved coordination among the different state agencies. State government has undertaken “some really great efforts” to coordinate and align early childhood programs, a stakeholder said. Another commented on “good synergy” among state agencies and divisions that handle early childhood programs but questioned if recent progress with coordination is sustainable under Minnesota’s current governance approach.

Officials with MDE, MDH, DHS, and the Children’s Cabinet also cited recent coordination efforts among agencies. They said agencies were doing a much better job sharing information and bringing the right people to the table for discussions. For example, agencies are communicating and working with each other on legislative funding requests that pertain to early childhood. Partner agencies have also come together to identify and address

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<sup>217</sup> Minnesota Department of Education, “Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five (PDG B-5) Project Description,” no date, 2, [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiVtNyBs67xAhUGG80KHfegDhgQFjAFegQIChAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Feducation.mn.gov%2Fmdeprod%2Fidcplg%3FidcService%3DGET\\_FILE%26dDocName%3DMDE085829%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary&usq=AOvVaw1tvxLo26Dg0ilGTZSKCwkg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiVtNyBs67xAhUGG80KHfegDhgQFjAFegQIChAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Feducation.mn.gov%2Fmdeprod%2Fidcplg%3FidcService%3DGET_FILE%26dDocName%3DMDE085829%26RevisionSelectionMethod%3DlatestReleased%26Rendition%3Dprimary&usq=AOvVaw1tvxLo26Dg0ilGTZSKCwkg).

<sup>218</sup> Bipartisan Policy Center, “Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System,” 36–37.

systemic barriers to coordination and to find ways to improve how families interact with state government for early childhood services. DHS officials cited the Education and Child Care COVID-19 Response Workgroup as an example of highly effective coordination that led the organization Save the Children in early 2021 to name Minnesota the number one state along with Utah for protecting children during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>219</sup>

Many of those who spoke with MAD about what Minnesota does well attributed recent successful coordination to work on the federal Preschool Development Grant and efforts by the Children’s Cabinet. In particular, officials said the Children’s Cabinet has excelled in identifying coordination gaps and addressing them.

Another strength, according to State of Minnesota officials, is the interest and energy behind improving early childhood outcomes for all Minnesotans. They said Minnesota has strong networks that care deeply about supporting children and families, from the Walz-Flanagan Administration making children a central focus to state agency staff working together to the committed providers and advocates at the community level.

A few stakeholders also mentioned good work on the part of the state with outreach and engagement efforts. “I know we’ve come a long way from when we were an afterthought. That has improved, and we have a better working relationship with DHS,” one said. Officials at the Children’s Cabinet also noted recent improvements in engagement for early childhood programs and policy, linking this in part to community and stakeholder engagement carried out during the needs assessment phase for the federal PDG.

***“I am seeing the transition over time into a period where the state government is listening very closely.” Community stakeholder***

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Other Minnesota strengths that state officials and community stakeholders mentioned include getting better at identifying the greatest disparities, operationalizing the whole family approach to programs and services, identifying models that work, and the recently created Help Me Connect website that links families to early childhood services and resources, prenatally through eight years of age.

## Some of the challenges for Minnesota

In responding to MAD’s question about how well or poorly Minnesota’s current governance structure is working, some of the community stakeholders and early childhood advocates commented on shortcomings and failures in the system, both related to governance and beyond it. They said early childhood programs are complex, fragmented, and underfunded. “This is the most important time of life and gets the least attention,” one advocate said. “Things aren’t working,” another said. “It’s a hot mess.” Several stakeholders and advocates complained of limited slots for child care and early education programs and cited access as a problem for families. A couple of the stakeholders and advocates suggested that Minnesota and the rest of the nation depend on a market-based system for child care that renders the sector unprofitable if centers and family-based providers are to cover costs and sufficiently compensate those providing the early care and education. In their

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<sup>219</sup> “New Report Ranks the Best and Worst States for Children during COVID,” Save the Children, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/about-us/media-and-news/2021-press-releases/new-report-ranks-best-and-worst-states-for-children-during-covid>.

comments about shortcomings in the system, many stakeholders and providers echoed the motivations and priority reasons they gave for why Minnesota should change its governance structure (page 3939).

MAD asked leaders at MDE, MDH, DHS, and the Children’s Cabinet where Minnesota needs to make the greatest strides. Officials from each agency cited data sharing and other IT aspects of their systems. Authority and ownership of data is spread very thin, which complicates decision-making about data, they said. This makes it unlikely that a particular data owner knows all the ways the data are used and all the implications and potential privacy issues with allowing access to it. For example, data for the Child Care Assistance Program is controlled by the Minnesota Family Investment Program for federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. Therefore, TANF data owners need to be consulted regarding any changes in access to CCAP data. DHS has begun work to untangle some issues with decision-making for data, but progress is slow due in part to resource constraints, officials said.

A key finding from the 2018 evaluation of early childhood programs by Minnesota’s Office of the Legislative Auditor was that the state cannot produce unduplicated counts of children served by the state.<sup>220</sup> The Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) is addressing some of the concerns outlined in that report. For example, it has developed data sharing agreements with DHS for CCAP data. The ECLDS resides in MDE, but much of its funding comes from the Office of Higher Education. Persistent challenges for the ECLDS include navigating federal data sharing regulations, such as those under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and building staff capacity to foster partnerships with other potential data sources.

When discussing areas in need of improvement, some State of Minnesota officials also brought up the way families access and navigate services, citing the need to make access consistent regardless of geography, race, or ethnicity. Officials also said the state should streamline application processes and more intentionally coordinate them around families. Officials in several interviews emphasized that success with early childhood education is interrelated with family and economic stability and with the child’s and family’s health and well-being. As one state official involved in the federal PDG said, “We spend lots of time, money, effort... to get services to families, instead of changing the conditions of the family, the conditions of the community.”

Several of officials noted that to truly change the way families access services, work needs to be more coordinated at the local level where services are delivered. Differences in county size, population, and resources lead to uneven capabilities among counties, schools, and other providers. Under PDG, the state has worked to address this by creating community resource hubs, but Minnesota needs to make sure that model is sustainable. Some state officials involved in PDG efforts noted that the hub reporting structure at the state level might not be conducive to strong collaboration.

Several also said that the early childhood system overall has limited capacity to accomplish all that needs to be done. Staff capacity is limited. The state needs more managers who can lead through change, make and maintain strategic connections, and drive accountability. More funding is needed. A state official involved with PDG said, “The fact that we need to blend and braid [different funding streams] is a symptom of an inadequately funded system.” Others involved with PDG said difficulties with coordination across agencies has less to do with

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<sup>220</sup> Office of the Legislative Auditor, “Early Childhood Programs,” S-1.

governance than with the shifts in priorities that occur when there is a change in executive branch administration and with the challenges of the separate funding streams used for early childhood programs.<sup>221</sup>

## Research methods and community engagement

MAD drew upon a variety of information sources to produce this report on early childhood governance for the State of Minnesota. The appendices to this report include listings of sources and of questions MAD asked the participants in discussion groups and interviews. This section of the report provides an overview of MADs methods for the different types of research conducted. Because Children’s Cabinet secured help from MAD for this report in the final days of August 2021 and MAD promising to deliver a draft by the end of 2021, MAD staff had limited time to conduct research, including community engagement and interviews. Nonetheless, MAD concludes that more time, engagement, and interviews would not likely have led to clearer guidance on early childhood governance choices for Minnesota.

### Community engagement

In the short time available for research on this governance report, MAD was able to engage with just more than 100 community stakeholders and early childhood advocates in discussion groups and several interviews from mid-October to early December 2021.<sup>222</sup> With input from officials at the Children’s Cabinet, MAD worked with a variety of groups to organize nine separate discussion sessions, held online rather than in person. In most cases, the discussions lasted one hour, however time constraints for several groups kept the interaction to less than that. MAD also interviewed a limited number of early childhood advocates whom officials the Children’s Cabinet identified as important leaders to consult, including key contacts at the Children’s Defense Fund–Minnesota and Education Minnesota. MAD conducted these interviews online. Refer to Appendix C (page 84) for a list of those who participated in community engagement for this report. For discussions and interviews with community stakeholders and early childhood advocates, MAD choose not to connect specific comments to any participant by name in order to ensure a candid discussion.

In addition, MAD reviewed relevant comments and findings from the extensive community engagement efforts state agencies carried out for Minnesota’s PDG needs assessment in 2019, and findings from MDH’s 2020 needs

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<sup>221</sup> Members of the Preschool Development Grant Advisory Group, State of Minnesota, November 19, 2021.

<sup>222</sup> For this total, MAD counted only the 14 participants who spoke during a discussion session organized by the non-profit advocacy group ISAIAH for its Kids Count on Us coalition of community-based child care providers, teachers, and parents. The call included more than 30 participants total.

assessment for the federal Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, which also involved extensive community engagement.<sup>223</sup>

For the purposes of this report, MAD used the label “community stakeholders” to describe discussion participants involved in the delivery of early childhood services, as well as those who received those services for their young children. MAD used the label “early childhood advocates” for discussion and interview participants who advocate for early childhood policies and initiatives but do not provide services.

Among those who expressed a preference, participants in the discussion sessions and interviews had a range of opinions about consolidating Minnesota’s programs into a new department dedicated solely to early childhood. Not all the participants voiced their opinions. The participants who did so in five of the groups had mixed reactions to the idea of a new department, with some in favor and others opposed. There was overall support for consolidation from participants in three other groups—strong in one case and in favor but with some caveats for the other two. Participants in the ninth group were not in favor of a new department but recognized potential benefits. The groups and their participants were not necessarily a representative sample of those involved in early childhood, so MAD offers this general sense of opinions only to capture the preferences expressed about a new early childhood department by those consulted for this governance report. Again given time constraints, MAD was able to engage in only a limited range of those involved and interested in early childhood governance.

With regard to community engagement with the tribal nations whose borders lie within the State of Minnesota’s boundaries, MAD held a discussion session with planning team members of the Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care. In addition, Erin Bailey, Assistant Commissioner and Executive Director of the Children’s Cabinet, presented on planned work for this governance report to the Tribal Nations Education Committee. If plans for a major change in early childhood governance move forward, MAD suggests that the State of Minnesota formally engage with the governments of these sovereign tribal nations about options, plans, and potential impacts.

## Research studies and reports

MAD reviewed more than 40 studies, reports, other documents, and recorded webinars on such topics as early childhood governance, effective state government organization for programs and services, Minnesota’s early childhood programs and governance, and the governance approaches and plans used in other states. Researchers have compiled a wealth of studies and reports relevant to state-level governance of early childhood programs, much of it from 2016 through 2021. Refer to Appendix D (page 89) for the list of these sources.

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<sup>223</sup> For more information about these community engagement efforts, go to the Minnesota Department of Education’s website on “Needs Assessment and Community Engagement” at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/early/preschgr/NeedsPlan>; and the Minnesota Department of Health’s website, “Title V Maternal and Child Health Needs Assessment,” <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/titlev/assessment.html>.

## Other states

To better understand the advantages, disadvantages, and some of the opportunities and challenges related to early childhood governance, MAD examined a cross-section of states that use both consolidated and coordinated approaches as identified by the Education Commission of the States.<sup>224</sup> MAD conducted background research on twelve states and engaged with nine states that use various forms of consolidation: California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington. MAD reached out to representatives to each of these states via email to request additional information. All but Massachusetts and New Mexico responded, either in writing or via phone. A list of the individuals who responded to MAD’s requests for information is found in Appendix E (page 93). This report includes summaries of information about experience with governance of early childhood programs in California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, and Oregon.

## State of Minnesota officials

To better understand the agency perspective on governance structure for early childhood and the practical implications of a reorganization, MAD reached out to officials from MDE, MDH, and DHS. A total of 18 State of Minnesota officials talked with MAD for this governance report. For interactions with top officials, all agencies responded to requests for interviews and were forthcoming and candid in sharing their thoughts. Interviews took place from November 5 through November 19, 2021. MAD also held a discussion session with agency directors, supervisors, managers, and leads involved in Minnesota’s work under the federal Preschool Development Grant. For that session, MAD chose not to connect comments to any participant by name in order to ensure a candid discussion. After reviewing background information and engaging in preliminary discussions with state officials, MAD determined it would also be beneficial to speak with State of Minnesota staff who work on the state’s data systems and interview two such individuals. A full list of the Minnesota officials MAD interviewed and the example interview questions are located in Appendix F (page 94).

## Interviews and webinars with experts

In addition to the sources noted above, MAD also sought insights into early childhood governance through a limited number of interviews with several prominent national experts and by participating in several national webinars about the topic offered in October by the national Technical Assistance Center for federal Preschool Development Birth through Five grants. For expert interviews, MAD spoke with Lori Connors-Tadros and Elliot Regenstein, both of whom have carried out significant research into state early childhood governance and have published extensively on this and related topics. Refer to Appendix G (page 97) for more information.

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<sup>224</sup> Education Commission of the States, “Early Care and Education Governance.”

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Current child care initiatives across state government (Children’s Cabinet document, 2021)

This is a running list of current initiatives focused on child care across Minnesota state government. Though the boundaries of what constitutes an “initiative” are somewhat blurry, this list aims to focus on projects, programs, or other efforts that actively seek to improve the early care and education system. Most of these initiatives are currently funded with [American Rescue Plan] resources.

### Department of Human Services

#### *Children and Family Services*

**Child Care Stabilization Grants** – Current round of grants to child care providers will distribute \$304.398 million in direct payments to child care providers, with requirement that at least 70 percent of the base grant go to provide increased compensation, benefits or premium pay to employees.

**Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)** – In most recent legislative session, reimbursement rates increased from the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of 2018 market rate survey to the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile for infants and toddlers and 30<sup>th</sup> percentile for preschool/school-age tied to updates for the 2021 and 2024 market rate survey. In addition, reimbursement rates for legal non-licensed providers are increasing from 68% of to 90% of the licensed family child care rate. The Basic Sliding Fee CCAP waiting list will be reprioritized.

**Background study fee support** – DHS was allocated \$4.5 million to continue paying certain background study fees for child care providers and support for background study implementation.

**Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) support (DHS)** - \$1.5 million for grants to community-based organizations working with FFN caregivers ([refer here](#) for information on previous funding and existing efforts to support FFN providers)

**Family Child Care Training Advisory Committee** – DHS was directed to form and establish the committee, which will meet from January 2022 to December 2025.

**Parent Aware** – DHS administers Parent Aware, the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System. Recent legislation allocated \$1.435 million for a study to evaluate Parent Aware and conduct engagement needed for a report on equity.

**Children in foster care** – DHS will complete a report and engagement to better understand participation of children in foster care in early childhood programs.

**Family Supports and Improvement Program** – DHS will complete a report to address data sharing across agencies and programs that impact children and families.

### *Child Development Services*

**Child Care Facility Grants** – DHS was allocated \$22.5 million for child care providers or facility improvements, minor renovations, and related equipment and services, including assistance meeting licensing requirements. Administered through First Children’s Finance.

**Workforce Development Grants** – DHS is convening a workgroup to design a system to provide economically challenged individuals the jobs skills training, career counseling, and job placement assistance needed for a career path in child care. Administered through Child Care Aware of Minnesota.

**Retaining Early Educators through Attaining Incentives Now (REETAİN)** – Recent legislation added \$1 million for this provider retention grant program; also codified this program into Minnesota law. Administered through Child Care Aware of Minnesota.

**Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH)** – Recent legislation added \$2 million for higher education scholarships; also made small changes to the authorizing language for this program. Administered through Child Care Aware of Minnesota.

**One Stop Regional Assistance Network** – DHS is convening a workgroup to develop and begin to carry out a one-stop network for individuals interested in establishing or sustaining a licensed family child care or center-based child care setting. Administered through Child Care Aware of Minnesota.

**Child Care Business Training and Consultation** – DHS administers funds to help child care providers build, strengthen, and acquire business skills. Administered through First Children’s Finance.

**Shared Services Innovation Grants** – Recent legislation authorized \$200K for a grant pilot to help start shared services agreements and provide economies of scale for family child care businesses.

### *Office of the Inspector General (Licensing)*

**Family child care FAQ page** – DHS is directed to develop a frequently asked questions webpage for FCC providers that includes a search function.

**Family child care ombudsperson** – DHS is directed to create an ombudsperson position.

**Alternative Child Care Licensing Models** – DHS was allocated \$100,000 to create a working group to explore child care models that are not currently allowed under state statutes.

**Child care licensing modernization** – DHS was allocated \$3.778 million to modernize family child care and center-based license regulations.

**Child care technology improvements** – DHS was allocated \$7.65 million for updates to technology for Licensing and CCAP.

### **Department of Employment and Economic Development**

**Child Care Economic Development Grants** - \$8 million for child care supply building grants (\$5 million in DEED grants and \$3 million to the Minnesota Initiative Foundations, for two biennia)

### **Minnesota Management and Budget**

**Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force** – The Children’s Cabinet will convene a legislative task force focused on early care and education affordability, access, and workforce. The group will begin meeting before the end of 2021.

**Early Childhood Governance Report (updated)** – The Children’s Cabinet will report on early childhood governance structures for Minnesota.

**Re-Imagine Consultants** – The Children’s Cabinet has been working with a group of pro bono consultants to evaluate existing licensing processes and develop recommendations for improvement.

**ECE Collaboratory** – The Children’s Cabinet, along with representatives from several State agencies, has been participating in the ECE Collaboratory, a national cohort program led by First Children’s Finance. The group has assessed the ECE landscape in Minnesota and is working on developing a plan to strengthen various aspects of the system.

**Child Care Action Team** – The Children’s Cabinet convenes a monthly meeting of this cross-agency group. The group has identified increased child care supply as a guiding goal. The meetings serve as an opportunity to share interagency updates, solicit feedback on developing efforts, and share ideas.

**ECE Business Supports Research Plan** – To guide her work, the ECE Business Support Specialist has put together a research plan aimed at gathering and synthesizing information related to barriers child care providers face to a stable, sustainable business model and potential solutions. This plan includes a set of provider interviews.

### **Minnesota Department of Education**

**Pre-Kindergarten programs** – MDE administers the state’s various pre-K programs, including School Readiness, School Readiness Plus, and Voluntary Pre-K. Recent legislation extended funding for two more years (FY22 and FY23) for 4,000 Voluntary Prekindergarten seats.

**Early Childhood Governance and Financing Grant** – The State of Minnesota was recently awarded an ECGF grant, a privately-funded grant that supports states in improving the governance and financing aspects of their early childhood systems. Minnesota proposes to evaluate several promising local practices across the state to identify elements that could be scalable to other communities.

**Early Learning Scholarships** – Early Learning Scholarships help families pay for high-quality early care and education experiences. Scholarships are administered by Area Administrators in each county.

**Preschool Development Grant workforce efforts** – Through the Preschool Development Grant (PDG), Minnesota is engaged in a variety of activities focused on support for the early childhood workforce, including updating the State’s Knowledge and Competency Framework, and working with institutions of higher education to understand gaps and supports for preparing the workforce.

### **Office of Higher Education**

**Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program** – Recent legislation removed the enrollment eligibility caps, and instead caps eligibility for those who have received grant funds over ten semesters, increased the maximum grant from \$3,000 to \$6,500, and reduced the minimum enrollment requirement for undergraduate from six credits to one.

## Appendix B: Past approaches to early childhood governance for Minnesota

Minnesota’s attention to the governance of early childhood programs and systems spans nearly 30 years and several executive branch administrations. In the mid-1990s under Governor Arne Carlson, Minnesota expanded the Department of Education to include a broader scope of programs for children from birth through their teenage years, although the department shifted back to a focus on Education in the early 2000s. In 2014, the Minnesota Department of Education created the Office of Early Learning in part to coordinate early childhood programs across agencies, although the office ended when federal grant funding expired.

### Department of Children, Families, and Learning

In 1993, Governor Arne Carlson proposed a new department of children and education services in his state of the state address.<sup>225</sup> “We have created too many individual government specialty shops,” he said. “... Our children are being divided into pieces by a system that is largely government-centered and difficult to use.”<sup>226</sup> Governor Carlson called for the department to address needs from birth through the teenage years.<sup>227</sup>

Also in 1993, Governor Carlson signed an executive order creating Minnesota’s Children’s Cabinet. That iteration of the cabinet was phased out when the state created the new agency.<sup>228</sup> The 1993 Minnesota Legislature passed legislation creating Family Service Collaboratives and providing grants for planning and implementation,<sup>229</sup> but the legislature later discontinued that funding.

In 1995 the Minnesota Legislature passed Minnesota Statute 119A.01 to replace the Department of Education with the Department of Children, Families, and Learning.<sup>230</sup> The new agency’s purposes were to “increase the capacity of Minnesota communities to measurably improve the well-being of children and families by:

- (1) coordinating and integrating state funded and locally administered family and children programs;
- (2) improving flexibility in the design, funding, and delivery of programs affecting children and families;
- (3) providing greater focus on strategies designed to prevent problems affecting the well-being of children and families;
- (4) enhancing local decision making, collaboration, and the development of new governance models;

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<sup>225</sup> Governor Arne Carlson, “State of the State Address,” transcript of speech, January 14, 1993, 7, <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/pre2003/other/930052.pdf>.

<sup>226</sup> Carlson, “State of the State Address,” 3.

<sup>227</sup> Carlson, “State of the State Address,” 7.

<sup>228</sup> “Children’s Cabinet: An Inventory of Its Records,” Minnesota Historical Society, 2, <http://www2.mnhs.org/library/findaids/childcab.pdf>.

<sup>229</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 1993, Session Law. chapter 224, article 11, section 10, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1993/0/Session+Law/Chapter/224/>.

<sup>230</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 1995, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 3, article 16, section 1, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1995/1/Session+Law/Chapter/3/>.

- (5) improving public accountability through the provision of research, information, and the development of measurable program outcomes;
- (6) increasing the capacity of communities to respond to the whole child by improving the ability of families to gain access to services;
- (7) encouraging all members of a community to nurture all the children in the community; and
- (8) supporting parents in their dual roles as breadwinners and parents.”<sup>231</sup>

Among its other elements, including state support for K-12 education, the Department of Children, Families, and Learning absorbed Head Start and programs administered by community action agencies, as well as the following programs from the Department of Human Services:

- the Children’s Trust Fund,
- Family Service Collaboratives,
- Early Childhood Care and Education Council,
- Childcare programs under section 256H.01 to 256H.19,
- the Migrant Child Care Program,
- the Childcare Resource and Referral Program, and
- the Childcare Service Development program.<sup>232</sup>

Several programs to address the needs for older children were also transferred from other agencies to the Department of Children, Families, and Learning.

Little is documented about the effectiveness of the new department. A 1999 financial audit of the Department of Children, Families, and Learning conducted by the Office of the Legislative Auditor indicated the department was not in compliance with several federal funding guidelines.<sup>233</sup> Assistant Commissioner of Health Mary Manning was working at the local level when this consolidation occurred and described her experience with the consolidation as “very confusing.”<sup>234</sup> She said that she was working with funding streams and a new range of partners and that it was unclear where in state government to go with questions and what families to focus on in the work.<sup>235</sup>

In 2003, the state replaced that broader state agency with the Minnesota Department of Education under the leadership of Governor Tim Pawlenty, who proposed this move “as a symbol of his intention to fundamentally change the way education was working in Minnesota—and as part of larger reorganization efforts.”<sup>236</sup> MDE

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<sup>231</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 1995, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 3, article 16, section 1, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1995/1/Session+Law/Chapter/3/>.

<sup>232</sup> Laws of Minnesota, 1995, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 3, article 16, section 1, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/1995/1/Session+Law/Chapter/3/>.

<sup>233</sup> Office of the Legislative Auditor, “Department of Children, Families & Learning Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1999,” State of Minnesota, March 10, 2000. <https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/fad/access/00-05.htm>.

<sup>234</sup> Manning and Brandt Interview, November 5, 2021.

<sup>235</sup> Minnesota Department of Health interview, November 2021.

<sup>236</sup> “Children, Families, and Learning Department,” compiled by the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, updated October 30, 2019, <https://www.lrl.mn.gov/agencies/detail?AgencyID=221>.

retained Head Start, School Readiness, early childhood health and development screening, and Early Childhood Family Education; child care programs and migrant children programs went to DHS.<sup>237</sup>

## 2010 legislative report on how to transition DHS child care to MDE

In 2009 the Minnesota Legislature asked DHS and MDE to develop a 2010 report outlining how to transition the DHS Child Care Assistance Program and related child care grants to MDE. The report described the complexity of the work DHS and MDE carry out and the challenges of consolidating programs. It also called for the following should the Legislature move forward with consolidation:

- “Integration of early learning child standards and program quality standards into all early childhood settings
- Statewide planning for kindergarten transition
- Alignment of state dollars and policies with the expanding focus at both the state and federal levels on preparing at-risk children for kindergarten
- Alignment of policies and services directed at preparing children for kindergarten regardless of the setting that families choose for their young children.”<sup>238</sup>

## Office of Early Learning Task Force report

The 2010 Minnesota Legislature called for a task force to make recommendations on the creation of an Office of Early Learning. The task force, along with the Early Childhood Advisory Council, recommended the creation of a free-standing, cabinet-level Office of Early Learning based on input and comments from state officials, legislators, community members, and the public.<sup>239</sup> The task force identified four top priority functions for the new office out of a list of 11 provided by the legislature:

1. “Develop seamless delivery system with local points of entry for early care and education programs administered by local, state, and federal agencies.
2. Consolidate and coordinate resources in public funding, and ensure the accountability and coordinated development of all early care and education services from birth to kindergarten entrance.
3. Establish administrative framework for and promote the development of early care and education services so that these services, staffed by well-qualified professionals, are available in every community for all families that express a need for them.
4. Develop and manage an effective data collection system to support the necessary functions of a coordinated early care and education system, allowing for accurate evaluation of impact.”<sup>240</sup>

Additionally, the task force recommended the following goals for the new Office of Early Learning:

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<sup>237</sup> Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Office of Early Learning,” January 2011, 11, <https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/2011/mandated/110109.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> Minnesota Department of Human Services, “Early Learning Study,” 24.

<sup>239</sup> Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Office of Early Learning,” 7.

<sup>240</sup> Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Office of Early Learning,” 20–21.

- “Accountability for progress toward goal of all children ready for kindergarten by 2020.
- Heighten the early childhood profile and public awareness.
- Break down silos that currently exist in three departments.
- Strengthen ability of braiding/layering of funds to have most impact on goal.
- Strengthen the connection to and leverage of private resources (funds and leadership).
- One person who has authority over all decisions, or authority over most and influence over the rest.
- Single point of contact for legislators, other agency staff, public.
- Single point of contact to monitor and record what is happening, take proactive steps to ensure agreed-upon policies, take corrective action for going off course.”<sup>241</sup>

Finally, the task force recommended programs to be within the scope of the new Office of Early Learning:

#### **“Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)**

- Early Childhood Family Education
- Early Childhood Health and Development Screening
- Early Childhood Special Education (Part C, Part B 619)\*

#### **Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)**

- Child Care Assistance Program
- Child Care Development Grants (Building Quality, Family Friend and Neighbor, Professional Development System, Information to Parents)
- Early Childhood Facilities Grants Migrant Child Care\*
- School Readiness Connections Parent Aware/Quality Rating and Improvement System\*

#### **Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)**

- Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (MECCS) Grant\*
- Family Home Visiting

\*Not identified in legislation for consideration in Office of Early Learning”<sup>242</sup>

The Task Force report notes that while the majority of the task force agreed on the scope of responsibilities for an office of early learning, there was no Task Force decision on co-locating programs and staff to a common space.<sup>243</sup>

## **Office of Early Learning at MDE**

MDE’s Office of Early Learning was created in 2011 as part of the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant to oversee the grant administration and the administration of the MDE Early Learning Services

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<sup>241</sup> Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Office of Early Learning,” 21.

<sup>242</sup> Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Office of Early Learning,” 21–22.

<sup>243</sup> Early Childhood Advisory Council, “Office of Early Learning,” 21 and 26.

Division.<sup>244</sup> Its mission was to “partner with families [and] communities across the state, and align human [and] financial supports across agencies, to promote healthy child development from prenatal through grade 3.”<sup>245</sup> Once the grant was complete, the coordination responsibilities of the Office of Early Learning were restructured and some functions were reorganized into a the Children’s Cabinet.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Minnesota Department of Education interview, November 2021.

<sup>245</sup> Office of Early Learning, presentation to the Minnesota Legislature.

<sup>246</sup> Carter and Monson, “Early Childhood Systems Building Proposal.”

# Appendix C: Community engagement

## Participants in discussions and interviews

Some individuals were included in more than one discussion session because of participation in multiple early childhood groups.

### **Children’s Cabinet Advisory Council and State Advisory Council for Early Education and Care**

Laurie Coleman, Head Start Director, Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc

Kelvin Currington, Senior Youth Intervention Specialist, YMCA

Barb Fabre, CEO/President, Indigenous Visioning and All Nations Rise

Anna Gruber, City Administrator, Sartell

Megan Gunnar, Regents Professor and Distinguished McKnight University Professor, University of Minnesota

Lynn Haglin, former Vice President/KIDS PLUS Director, Northland Foundation

Dianne Haulcy, Senior Vice President of Family Engagement Think Small

Keenan Jones, Administrator for Department of Innovation, Design, & Learning, Hopkins Public Schools

Nicole Kern, Director, Morrison County Community Corrections

Jennifer Mueller, School of Education Dean, St. Cloud State University

Rep. Dave Pinto, Chair of the Minnesota House Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee

Andrea Singh, Chair of Pediatrics Department and Clinical Medical Director of the Lakeville Park Nicollet Clinic

Aaron Sojourner, Associate Professor, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota

Bharti Wahli, Executive Director, Children’s Defense Fund–Minnesota

Jodi Wambeke, Early Childhood Family Programs Manager at Willmar Public Schools

### **Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota**

Debra Fitzpatrick, Director of Policy and Research, Children’s Defense Fund – Minnesota

Bharti Wahli, Executive Director, Children’s Defense Fund–Minnesota

### **Children’s Defense Fund–Minnesota ECE Advocates**

Sean Burke, ISAIAH and Kids Count on Us Coalition

Kari Cooper, Program Officer, Northwest Minnesota Foundation

Allison Corrado, Program Officer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation

Cyndi Cunningham, Licensed Family Child Care Provider and Public Policy Chairperson for the Minnesota Child Care Provider Information Network

Glenace Edwall, Elders for Infants

Barb Fabre, CEO/President, Indigenous Visioning and All Nations Rise

Phil Griffin, Ewald Consulting representing the Minnesota Child Care Association

Frank Forsberg, Little Moments Count and Itasca First 1000 Days

Iris Happo, Fullbright Scholar, University of Minnesota Morris and West Central Initiative

Danielle Hayden Early Childhood Special Education Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Education

Nancy Jost, Director of Early Childhood, West Central Initiative

Cisa Keller, Senior Vice President for Early Childhood Quality Development, Think Small  
Jane Kretzmann, Elders for Infants  
Anne Krisnik, Executive Director, Joint Religious Legislative Coalition  
May Lososo, Community Engagement Director, Children’s Defense Fund–Minnesota  
Ericca Maas, Executive Director, Close Gaps by 5  
Natalia Madryga, Government Affairs Manager, Hylden Advocacy and Law  
Ann McCully, Executive Director, Child Care Aware of Minnesota  
Sara McKeever, Parent Educator, Sauk Rapids-Rice School District, and Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education  
Beth Menninga, Relationship Based Professional Development Manager, Center for Inclusive Child Care  
Jim Nicholie, Elders for Infants  
Missy Okeson, Program Officer for Community Impact Early Childhood, Northwest Minnesota Foundation  
Rob Vanasek, Alliance of YMCAs  
Katie Williams, Elders for Infants

**Education leaders (ad hoc group invited by MDE to discuss governance with MAD)**

School Early Childhood Coordinators

Jenna Rubel, Early Childhood Program Manager, Rosemont-Apple Valley-Eagan School District 196  
Darcy Rodriguez, Early Childhood Administrator, White Bear Lake Schools 624

Early Childhood Special Education Coordinators

Cora Huber, Special Services Coordinator for Early Childhood Special Education, South Washington County Schools  
Emily Rudolph, Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator, Hibbing Public Schools 701

The Minnesota Head Start Association

Anna Sheppard, Director, White Earth Head Start Programs

Minnesota Community Education Association

Annette Sallmana, Community Education Director, Stillwater Area Public Schools 834  
Michelle Trelstad, Director of Community Education, Anoka Hennepin School District 11  
Jen Jaros, Early Childhood Coordinator, Community Education, Duluth Public Schools ISD 709

**Education Minnesota**

Kevion Ellis, Lobbyist, Education Minnesota  
Sara Ford, Education Issues Specialist, Education Minnesota

**Kids Count on Us Coalition**

List includes those who offered comments. More than 30 participated in the online session.

Mary Anderson  
Luciano Carbello  
Nicole Flich  
Cynthia Haynes, parent  
Heather Kujava

Debra Messenger, co-author, “Minnesota’s Birth-4 Care and Education System”  
Maria Snider  
Mary Solheim, co-author, “Minnesota’s Birth-4 Care and Education System”  
Monique Stumon  
Karin Swenson, co-author, “Minnesota’s Birth-4 Care and Education System”  
Christina Valdez, Listros Childcare in Rochester  
Robin Wonsley  
Kiarra Zackery, co-author, “Minnesota’s Birth-4 Care and Education System”  
Lydia Boerboom

### **Local Public Health Association**

Sarah Grosshuesch, Public Health Director, Wright County  
Ann Stehn, Administrator, Horizon Public Health  
David Brummel, Director, Washington County Public Health and Environment  
Patty Bowler, Director of Policy and Community Programs, City of Minneapolis Public Health  
Susan Michels, Community Health Services Director, Carlton-Cook-Lake-St. Louis Community Health Board  
Marissa Hetland, Administrator, North Country Community Health Board  
Liz Auch, Director, Countryside Public Health  
Sarah Reese, Public Health Director, Polk County, and Administrator, Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Community Health Board  
Jody Lien, Public Health Director, Otter Tail County Public Health  
Breanna Allen, Public Health Manager, Nicollet County  
Sue Yost, Director and Community Health Services Administrator, Freeborn County  
Courtney Wehrenberg, Community Health Services Administrator, Chisago County

### **Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators**

December Brakefield, Early Childhood Coordinator, Health and Wellness Administration  
Meredith Martinez, MPH, Family Health Area Manager, Hennepin County Public Health

### **Minnesota Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care (MNTRECC) Planning Team**

Pat Broker, Senior Program Manager for Head Start and Early Head Start, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe  
Rebecca Littlewolf, Child Care Services Manager, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe  
Jessica Jackson, Child Care Director, White Earth Nation  
Kim Lage, Licensing Coordinator, White Earth Nation  
Ruby Gunneau, Child Care Director, Red Lake Nation  
Shannon Clark, Child Care Assistant, Red Lake Nation  
Amy Donaldson, Play Works Center Child Care Director, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community  
Janel O'Brien, Professional Development Advisor, MNTRECC  
Diane Smith, Culture and Language Coordinator, MNTRECC  
Lee Turney, Early Childhood Development Director for Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe  
Patti Turney, Program Manager, MNTRECC

## **PDG Community Solutions Advisory Council**

Brook LaFloe, Women's Foundation of Minnesota

Ying Lee, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

May Losloso, Community Engagement Director, Children's Defense Fund—Minnesota

Kenneth O. Turner, Jr., American Indian Magnet School

Jessica Velasco, Nobles County Integration Collaborative

## **PDG Subcommittee**

Betty Emarita, President and Founder, Development and Training Resources, Inc

Glenace Edwald, Elders for Infants

Tamie Finn, Director of Operations, Indigenous Visioning

Rachel Gens, Director of Elementary Education, Richfield Public School

Lynn Haglin, former Vice President/KIDS PLUS Director, Northland Foundation

Sandy Simar, Head Start Director, Families First of Minnesota

## **Others**

Elizabeth Gaines, Executive Director, Children's Funding Project

Kate Ritter, Early Childhood Advisor, Children's Funding Project

Nara Topp, former consultant on early childhood education and co-author of the 2011 report on "Office of Early Learning" for the Early Childhood Advisory Council, which later became the State Advisory Council for Early Education and Care.

## **Example discussion and interview questions**

Questions covered depended upon time allowed.

1. How well or poorly is Minnesota's current state-level governance structure working and why, particularly in terms of impacts on families and their children's early childhood development, care, and learning?
2. States nationwide use three common models for governance of early childhood programs, listed below in green. In the context of how the State of Minnesota might govern early childhood development, care, and learning going forward, please share your thoughts about:
  - a) What the pros and cons are for each of these three common approaches to state-level governance?
    - a. Do you have a preferred approach?
  - b) What needs to happen or what needs to be true for Minnesota to succeed with each of these governing approaches if it were to adopt them going forward? *[Emphasis placed on new department.]*
3. What are the current and future challenges and risks if the State of Minnesota implements changes to its governance of early childhood programs, and what are your ideas for how to overcome them?

4. If the State of Minnesota changes its governance approach for early childhood development, care, and learning, what one or two existing problems would you most want that change in governance to solve?
5. How might changes in the State of Minnesota's governance structure impact administration and governance of early childhood programs at other levels, such as the counties, the school districts, tribal nations, and with non-profit partners?
6. For a shift in governance toward consolidation—either by consolidating into a state agency or an existing one—what impacts do you see consolidation having in these areas:

Impacts on state government operations

- Coordination and alignment of early childhood programs within state government
- Articulation between early care and education programs and the kindergarten through grade 12 system

Impacts on children, families, and providers

- Kindergarten readiness of all children, regardless of race, income, and zip code
- Effort required of families to receive services they are entitled to
- Effort required of service providers to participate in childhood programs

## Appendix D: Reference research sources

Bruce Atchison and Louisa Diffey, "Education Trends: Governance in Early Childhood Education," Education Commission of the States, December 2018, <https://www.ecs.org/governance-in-early-childhood-education/>.

Bipartisan Policy Center, "Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System to Support Children and Families: A State-by-State Analysis," December 2018, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Creating-an-Integrated-Efficient-Early-Care-and-Education-System-to-Support-Children-and-Families-A-State-by-State-Analysis.pdf>.

Karen Cadigan, Nara Topp, and Stephanie Clothier, "Office of Early Learning," Early Childhood Advisory Council, January 2011, <https://www.leg.mn.gov/docs/2011/mandated/110109.pdf>.

Miriam Calderon and Elizabeth Groginsky in a session on "A Strategic Approach to Governance and Financing for the ECE System," PDG B-5 TA Center, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services, webinar, July 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4oDM-FgNBmA&feature=youtu.be>.

Arne Carlson, "State of the State Address," transcript of speech, January 14, 1993, <http://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/pre2003/other/930052.pdf>.

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## Appendix E: Officials consulted in other states

**California:** Aressa Coley, West Ed Project Director, Preschool Development Birth through 5

**Colorado:** Lindsey Dorneman, Preschool Development Grant (written responses), Kristina Heyl, Early Childhood Leadership Commission Director

**District of Columbia:** Sara Mead, Assistant Superintendent of Early Learning

**Georgia:** Amy Jacobs, Commissioner, Department of Early Care and Learning

**Missouri:** Pam Thomas, Assistant Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood (written responses)

**Oregon:** Alyssa Chatterjee, Early Learning System Director (written responses)

**Washington:** Kelli Bohanon, Director of Early Learning Programs, and Tracie Kenney, Preschool Development Grant Administrator

# Appendix F: State of Minnesota officials

## Participants in discussions and interviews

### Minnesota's Children's Cabinet

- Erin Bailey, Assistant Commissioner
- Stephanie Hogenson, Policy Director
- Jenny Moses, Manager (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)

### Minnesota Department of Human Services

- Jodi Harpstead, Commissioner
- Nikki Farago, Deputy Commissioner
- Megan Waltz, Supervisor of Promotion and Prevention Unit, Child Safety and Permanency, Department of Human Services (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)
- Cindi Yang, Division Director of Child Care Services Division, Department of Human Services (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)
- Jovon Perry, Economic Assistance and Employment Supports Division Director, Department of Human Services (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)
- Lisa Barnidge, Enterprise Business Transformation Manager

### Minnesota Department of Education

- Heather Mueller, Commissioner
- Bobbie Burnham, Assistant Commissioner
- Danielle Hayden, Early Childhood Special Education Supervisor (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)
- Debbie Hewitt, Early Childhood Education Supervisor, Department of Education (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)
- Amanda Varley, Preschool Development Grant Manager, Department of Education (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)
- Jennifer Verbrugge, Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System Lead

### Minnesota Department of Health

- Mary Manning, Assistant Commissioner
- Joan Brandt, Community and Family Health Division Director
- Laura Guzman-Corrales, Preschool Development Grant Lead, Department of Health (discussion with directors and leaders for PDG)

## Example discussion and interview questions for State of Minnesota officials

1. Briefly, what do you believe Minnesota is doing well in terms of administering and governing early childhood programs (and should keep doing well)?
  - a. Where do you think Minnesota needs to make the greatest strides?
2. Were you involved in Minnesota's previous attempts to restructure the administration of Minnesota's early childhood programs?
3. There is currently a lot of interest around the consolidation of early childhood services into a single entity.
  - a. How would consolidation help or hinder the state's whole family approach to supporting healthy development?
  - b. How would consolidation affect the effort required of families to receive services to which they are entitled?
  - c. How would consolidation affect the effort required of service providers to participate in childhood programs?
  - d. Generally speaking, how would consolidation impact the way early childhood programs are currently coordinated and aligned? What opportunities exist for improved coordination/alignment with consolidation? What, if any, areas could become misaligned with consolidation?
  - e. In what ways will the rest of your agency be affected?
  - f. What are the practical implications of such a move (cultural change, regional involvement, stakeholder engagement)?
4. Where are there opportunities for easy wins (low-hanging fruit: improved governance, better coordination across programs, etc.)?
5. What areas do you believe will need the most attention?
6. How long should the transition period be? What considerations should be made in regard to timing?
7. What is your preferred early childhood governance structure (coordination, consolidation, creation, or a mix)?

## Discussion and interview questions for data systems interviewees

1. What are the biggest challenges to sharing data across programs?
  - a. Can you explain what has been done?

- b. What would it take to get to the next level of addressing these challenges?
  - c. What laws or statutes guide how data in the affected programs can be shared?
  - d. What internal rules guide how data in the affected programs can be shared?
  - e. What technical barriers exist to sharing data (data type, collection methods, ways to join, compatibility or availability of software or data systems)?
2. What challenges are unique to Minnesota?
- a. How can they be addressed?
  - b. If early childhood programs were to consolidate, what would it take to harmonize data systems to be workable?
  - c. What would be an ideal state for data systems in a consolidated early childhood department?
  - d. What actions would it take to get there?
  - e. What resources would it take to get there?
  - f. How would that impact current data systems or data sharing agreements?
3. From your perspective, what is ideal way to share data or set up permissions to share data across programs?
- a. How would this be helped or hindered by a change in the governance structure?

## Appendix G: Other interactions with experts

MAD consulted with or listened to the following experts in real time settings:

### Interviews

Lori Connors-Tadros, senior fellow, National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University, MAD, November 3, 2021.

Elliot Regenstein, Partner, Foresight Law+Policy, November 11, 2021.

### Live webinars

Lachelle Brant, Senior Policy Advisor, Wyoming Governor's Office, session on "Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change" at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: "Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems," October 21, 2021.

Adrienne Fischer, Policy Analyst, Education Commission of the States, session on "Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change" at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: "Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems," October 21, 2021.

Elizabeth Groginsky, Secretary of Early Childhood Education and Care, State of New Mexico, session on "Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change" at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: "Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems," October 21, 2021.

Elliot Regenstein, Partner, Foresight Law+Policy, sessions on "Early Childhood Governance" and "Leveraging Early Care and Education Governance to Effect Systems Change" at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: "Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems," October 21, 2021.

Dan Wuori, Senior Director of Early Learning, The Hunt Institute, session on "Sustaining Early Childhood Governance" at the 2021 PDG B-5 TA Center Virtual Convening: "Leveraging Strong Partnerships for Strong Early Childhood Systems," October 20, 2021.