

Legislative Update Report

Date: February 9, 2024

To: Representative Dave Pinto, Chair, House Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair, Senate Health and Human Services Committee

RE: Modernizing information technology for programs impacting children and families

Introduction and Background

In the 2023 legislative session, \$20 million for “modernizing information technology for programs impacting children and families” was included in the health and human services omnibus bill signed into law (Minnesota Laws 2023, Chapter 70, Article 12, Section 32). The legislation requires plan development, cross-agency engagement, and coordination and alignment with other systems modernization activities that affect the Departments of Human Services and Education, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) once operational, and other agencies with relevant programs as identified by the Children’s Cabinet. Per the legislation, “the plan must support the goal of creating new or modernizing existing information technology systems for child- and family-focused programs that collect, analyze, share, and report data on program participation and service coordination and school readiness, early screening, and other childhood indicators.” The plan must include strategies to:

- Minimize the time and effort needed for families to apply for, enroll in, and maintain enrollment in programs
- Minimize the time and effort needed for providers to administer programs
- Improve coordination among programs for families
- Assess the impact of childhood programs on children’s outcomes, including school readiness and educational outcomes
- Monitor and collect nonbiometric attendance data at child care centers licensed under Minnesota Rules, chapter 9503, through a combination of state-provided technology and integration with private child care management systems

Funds were appropriated to DHS and shall transfer to DCYF once operational. The Administration appreciates the opportunity to partner with advocates and the legislature to advance long needed cross-agency investments to improve service delivery for children, and specifically aligning resources and access for the early care and education system.

The legislation also required reporting by February 1 of each year to the legislative committees with jurisdiction over impacted programs on the status of the use of money, plan development, and strategy implementation. To

satisfy this requirement, this memo provides an update of the planning work completed in the six months since the funds were received.

Drafted Core Values for Fund Decision-Making

With a cross-agency team from DHS, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Children's Cabinet, and DCYF Implementation Office, in coordination with MNIT, guiding principles built on modernization strategy and approaches will guide the decision-making, in addition to the legislation and engagement. These principles and core values will be further refined with ongoing internal and external engagement.

Goal: Make decisions based on good data, trusted experts, and community insights

- Streamline decision-making process
- Instill strong project management, oversight, and accountability
- Improve data production, collection, and sharing
- Conduct meaningful data analysis and communicate data in a usable and understandable way

Goal: Modernize state government

- Use creative collaborations to rethink how government can address the needs of Minnesotans
- Develop innovative digital services that automate and digitize processes that enhance capacity to serve Minnesotans
- Explore shared services
- Promote a culture of continuous improvement
- Build on and align with existing modernization efforts

Goal: Support Minnesota children, families and those who serve them

- Center equity in decision making and use an equity lens on projects, with a focus on Minnesotans with the most significant barriers to accessing what they need such as service, benefits, language needs, and technology.
- Reduce burden to families in accessing services
- Ensure families have access to what they need
- Provide easy-to-navigate, person-centered supports that are linguistically and culturally responsive and use plain language

Goal: Engage partners in a collaborative and holistic manner

- Gather partner input through outreach and engagement
- Develop standard process to gather partner feedback
- Share knowledge and increase collaboration across state agencies and with local community

Goal: Direct and model cross-agency collaboration

- Ensure person-centered, whole family delivery of services across program areas
- Foster cross-agency problem solving and collaboration

Next Steps for Plan Development

Cross-agency teams will continue to move the planning and execution forward, coordinating on engagement themes heard in other efforts to inform the plan development and staying connected to opportunity related to new and aligned governance. Building on existing work the state has supported, the plan development will be informed by comprehensive engagement done through previous initiatives including the [Preschool Development Grant](#), [child care regulation modernization](#) projects, provider hub development, and the Early Learning Scholarship online application development.

For example, engagement efforts have recently taken place across multiple workstreams as part of the Child Care Systems Transformation. These efforts include over 41 interviews conducted, 12 user testing sessions, 4,800 survey responses, 57 working sessions, and over 150 partners directly involved.

Partners engaged in this cross-agency effort include DHS Licensors and Staff, County Licensors and Staff, Certified, Licensed and Family Child Care Providers, Tribal nations, Early Learning Scholarships (ELS) Area Administrators, and [Child Care Wayfinder](#) Navigators. Users from these groups have been engaged on development of features for attendance tracking, provider hub, agency hub, Wayfinder case management, Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program, and the ELS online application and case management system. Working sessions have included qualitative and quantitative user research, community engagement, focus groups, technology readiness initiatives, and live trainings.

Through these engagement efforts several themes were identified:

- Long-term vision and commitment to constituent experience
- Trust, privacy, and data security
- Intra-state and contracted agency alignment
- Efficiency, awareness, and accessibility
- Stronger connections and consistency
- Empowerment of local administrators

These comprehensive and aligned engagement efforts informing multiple projects will be key to inform the plan development for these funds and provide an example for how to develop a long-term vision for integrated IT systems and maintain a commitment to constituent engagement.

The legislation also requires coordination among related modernization projects across agencies. The groundwork for this coordination is founded in existing coordination efforts like the Preschool Development Grant and will continue to be solidified through the consolidation of many child and family programs in the new DCYF. For instance, a few modernization projects currently underway identified related to this plan development include:

- Early Learning Scholarships Online Application
- Provider Hub
- Discovery process for what it might look like to create a shared payment system between Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and Early Learning Scholarships
- Child Protection Paperwork Reduction
- Improvement to MAXIS Notices

- Child Support Modernization

Additionally, coordination in the plan development will consider related new initiatives as well as existing modernization efforts. Specifically related to the plan requirements, the Great Start Compensation Support Program (Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 119B.27) and Great Start Scholarship Program (Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 119B.99) have been identified as key programs for consideration in the early care and education related components required in the plan.

Moving forward, DHS plans to fund an external engagement for advisory services to ensure there is dedicated capacity to coordinate stakeholder and customer research and development of a roadmap plan. These resources will coordinate across agencies, plan for alignment with other modernization efforts, document and use themes and ideas from prior related engagements, plan additional engagement needed, draft the plan identified in statute, and create a process for strategic decision-making about how to implement the roadmap plan.

These funds support capacity and structures, including at DCYF, to build upon existing modernization efforts and further develop and continue work toward executing IT modernization plans that respond to what families and partners have been asking for, including the need for trust in our IT systems, improved coordination, and ease of access to what they need. Please reach out to [Jennifer Sommerfeld](#) at DHS for more information and feedback.