


# The Ohio Build Initiative

## 2009 Case Study

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# Overview

## The Structure and Focus of Build Ohio

### Basic Organization

Since 2008, the work of Build Ohio has operated under one main system-building governance structure: Ohio's Early Childhood Cabinet. The Cabinet was created by Governor Strickland in March 2007 to unite key state agencies around a common goal of promoting school readiness by setting and coordinating state policy and programs that serve Ohio's children, prenatal to six years of age. The Cabinet comprises the directors of all state agencies that oversee state-supported early childhood programs: the Ohio Departments of Education (ODE), Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Health (ODH), Mental Health (ODMH, Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (ODMRDD), and Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS).

Since its creation, the Early Childhood Cabinet has taken the lead in developing and articulating Ohio's vision for an early childhood development system that ensures that: (1) children have access to high-quality early care and education supports and environments; (2) children have supports and services to promote their comprehensive healthy development; and (3) families have meaningful community and parenting supports.

### Work and Development in 2009

Legislation contained in Ohio's FY 2010-2011 biennial budget bill (H.B. 1) included the creation of a Center for Early Childhood Development (CECD) within ODE in order to improve coordination and integration of early childhood development programs, services, and funding sources. Consequently in 2009, much of the work of the Early Childhood Cabinet, its workgroups, its advisory council, and other interested stakeholders has been focused on plans for the CECD. Prior to the passage of H.B. 1, these groups strategized about the Center's enabling legislation, what it should mandate, and what it should emphasize. Since the passage of H.B. 1, the Early Childhood Cabinet has coordinated two working groups – a Policy Team and an Operations Team – to craft an implementation plan for the CECD. A description of this work, the challenges and opportunities that have emerged, and the implications it all has on system-building in Ohio, comprise the bulk of this case study.

With the creation of the CECD, Ohio has been given an opportunity to design and implement a new administrative structure for the early childhood development system, for expectant mothers, and for families and children up to kindergarten entry. It is an exciting opportunity to build a state agency infrastructure that is focused on the comprehensive physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development needs of young children. It is also an opportunity to create a culture within state government that enables staff to deliver effective and efficient supports within a coordinated and integrated system of services, and to find new and innovative ways to work.

# Political Leadership

## Elected and Appointed Leadership

### Gubernatorial Leadership

For the last 3 years, Ohio's early childhood development system-building efforts have had a champion in Governor Ted Strickland. In 2007, with the formation of the Early Childhood Cabinet, Governor Strickland brought together state department directors responsible for early childhood programs with an eye toward funding, aligning, and building an integrated system. In 2008, the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), with representation from across the state, was appointed to provide advice and counsel to the Cabinet and support its goals. And in 2009, the governor proposed the creation of the new Center for Early Childhood Development within ODE. In the face of very difficult budget negotiations, Governor Strickland, in partnership with the General Assembly, also maintained his commitment to helping low-income families access early care and education programs with more than \$170 million in newly invested general revenue fund dollars for the early childhood system.

### Appointed Leadership

Appointed officials that supported and advocated for a strong statewide early childhood development system in 2009 include both familiar and some new faces:

- **Director of the Early Childhood Cabinet** (Alicia Leatherman) Since her appointment as Director of the Early Childhood Cabinet in 2007, Ms. Leatherman has worked with the Governor, state agency leaders, early childhood advocates, legislators, funders, and countless others to communicate the value and importance of early childhood systems building, to facilitate communication and collaboration between policy-makers and stakeholders, and to ensure that Ohio's vision for an integrated and comprehensive system of early childhood development become a reality.
- **Early Childhood Advisory Council members.** In 2009, the ECAC was codified in law to serve as the federally mandated state advisory council on early childhood education and care, to advise the state regarding the creation and duties of the CECD, and to "promote family-centered programs and services that acknowledge and support the social, emotional, cognitive, intellectual, and physical development of children and the vital role of families in ensuring the well-being and success of children." (ORC 3301.90). The Chair of the ECAC is appointed by the Governor, and its 45 members include a diverse array of primarily private stakeholders from early childhood programs, schools, higher education, foundations, and other groups.
- **Superintendent of Public Instruction** (Deborah Delisle). Deb Delisle was appointed as Ohio's new Superintendent of Public Instruction in October of 2008. In February 2009,

Governor Strickland's State of the State address focused heavily on education reform, calling for a new school funding formula and other priorities, many of which were incorporated into H.B. 1 and fell upon ODE to implement. By December, ODE had released a 10-year strategic plan for Ohio, which formally framed Ohio's public education system as a PreK-12 system and outlined six strategic goals for statewide education reform. Goal 5 of this plan is to develop and sustain a quality, affordable system of voluntary early education and care that helps close early learning achievement gaps among various groups of children. As plans for the creation of the CECD are implemented, many in the early childhood field are looking to ODE and Ms. Delisle to show meaningful commitment to and understanding of early childhood priorities.

- **State Board of Education member** (Tracey Smith). Ms. Smith serves as an appointed member of the State Board of Education, was appointed to the Early Childhood Advisory Council in 2009, and sat on the CECD Policy Team. Frequently, Ms. Smith has acted as liaison and bridge between the ECAC and the State Board, and has shown both a willingness and commitment to learning about early childhood priorities and issues of concern (even as they relate to ODE and the State Board). She has communicated these to the State Board, and continues to work toward collaboration, establishing linkages, and cross-agency system building.
- **Center for Early Childhood Development Transition Team members.** Members of the CECD Policy Team and Operations Team put in countless hours conceptualizing the vision, principles, and strategic direction of the Center (Policy Team) and the nuts and bolts processes that would allow the Center to operate smoothly (Operations Team). Members of the Policy Team included representatives from ODE, ODJFS, ODH, ODADAS, ODMH, ODMRDD, the Ohio Family and Children First Council, the ECAC, and the State Board of Education. Operations Team members are all state agency staff.

# Recognition of Need

## Current Research and Needs

In 2009, several research projects and assessments shed light on Ohio's current array of early childhood programs and services and the infrastructure and funding that support them. Other research also suggests where more work is needed and where the field's evaluation needs lie.

### Statewide Baseline Data

- **"As Is" State Matrix.** Part of the work of the Early Childhood Cabinet's CECD Operations Team included identifying specific agency programs and funds that would transfer to the Center once it was established. To inform this process, the group extensively researched and compiled an "As Is" matrix of state-sponsored programs and services specifically designed for and/or funded for children ages prenatal to six (not including local initiatives or funding sources).<sup>1</sup> The matrix uses the four-oval framework first developed by the Early Childhood Systems Working Group and adopted by Ohio's Early Childhood Cabinet. The key components, or ovals, are: (1) Education and Care, (2) Family Support, (3) Special Education and Intervention, and (4) Health, Behavioral Health, and Nutrition. (More detail about this framework is presented in the *Shared Vision* section of this case study.)
- **Data systems assessment.** Ohio's 2009 Longitudinal Data Systems Grant application (submitted in November) includes funding for a comprehensive assessment of all early childhood data systems at work in Ohio (data collection indicators, platforms, reporting, etc.). This is considered a first step toward sharing data across programs and systems.

### Financing the Early Childhood Development System

- **Early Childhood Financing Workgroup.** Under H.B.1, the Early Childhood Advisory Council must establish an Early Childhood Financing Workgroup to develop recommendations regarding the implementation of a single financing system for early care and education programs that includes aligned payment mechanisms and consistent eligibility and co-payment policies. At this writing, the workgroup has met once. Its recommendations are due to the Governor and the General Assembly in Spring 2010.
- **Comprehensive cost simulation.** In 2009, Build funding continued to support completion of a comprehensive cost simulation with the goal of determining how much Ohio is currently spending on the four ovals of its early childhood system. The goal is to identify various domains and components of Ohio's early childhood development system, determine what public funding exists to support it, and where there are gaps.

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<sup>1</sup> The matrix can be viewed at [http://www.build-ohio.org/cecd/files/operations/As-Is\\_State\\_Matrix--System\\_Elements\\_10.02.09.pdf](http://www.build-ohio.org/cecd/files/operations/As-Is_State_Matrix--System_Elements_10.02.09.pdf)

- **2008/2009 market rate survey.** Ohio conducts its market rate survey once every biennium. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, with assistance from The Ohio State University’s Statistical Consulting Services, collects data on current rates charged to private-pay customers from all licensed child care centers, “Type A” homes, professional certified home child care providers, and many private home child care providers. Market rate data are used to ensure that subsidized provider reimbursement rates are based on the most current data available per county.

### Accountability and Evaluation Needs

- **Accountability recommendations.** The CECD Implementation Plan<sup>2</sup>, released in December 2009, includes several recommendations to ensure that Ohio’s early childhood development accountability system uses data to inform policy, evaluate programs and investments, and enhance professional practices and links to other data systems. These include:
  - The creation of a **common child identifier** for all young children accessing early childhood development programs and supports;
  - The creation of a new or expanded **kindergarten readiness screening tool** that includes all five developmental domains and reflects a common definition of readiness (Ohio’s current assessment, the KRA-L, primarily assesses literacy);
  - Convening a **workgroup to develop outcome indicators** for Ohio’s early childhood development system, using research already completed by the Ohio Family and Children First Council and the School Readiness Solutions Group.
- **Social/emotional evaluation needs.** In 2009, the Early Childhood Cabinet and the Sisters of Charity Foundation sponsored a series of forums to explore and better understand the early childhood community’s priorities for future research, evaluation, and data analysis efforts that could support early childhood policies, investment, professional development, operations, and practice. The top issue participants prioritized for further inquiry dealt with social and emotional development. Forum participants want more information about the impact of social and emotional issues on a child’s progress as well as more information on how to better shape practice to ensure healthy social and emotional development.<sup>3</sup>
- **Return on investment evaluation needs.** The second issue prioritized by forum participants concerned return on investment. The specific series of questions asked “Are early childhood programs resulting in the intended outcomes? Is the desired result due to one program or multiple programs? At what level of frequency are effective results achieved?”

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<sup>2</sup> The Implementation Plan can be viewed at [http://www.build-ohio.org/cecd/files/CECD\\_Implementation\\_Draft6\\_123009\\_v3.pdf](http://www.build-ohio.org/cecd/files/CECD_Implementation_Draft6_123009_v3.pdf)

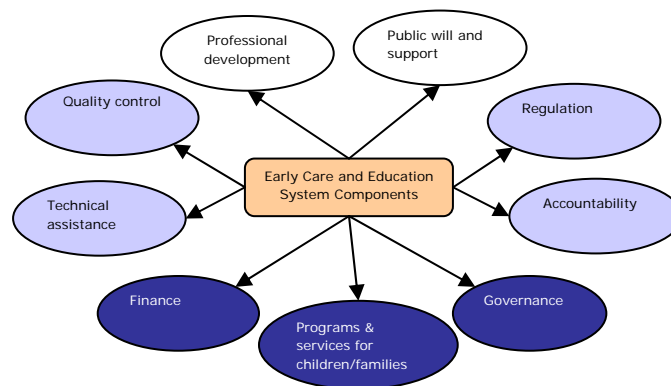
<sup>3</sup> Source: *Forums with Ohio’s Early Childhood Community on Research, Evaluation, and Data Analysis Opportunities*. September-October 2009 by the JRS Group, Ltd.

# Shared Vision

## Conceptualizing a Comprehensive Early Childhood Development System

### Foundational Work

Past case studies have described the early work of Build Ohio’s board, its vision, and strategic direction as representing the collective will of a diverse group of leaders in early care and education policy, advocacy, and service delivery. To solicit the participation of a diverse group of public and private stakeholders, Build Ohio’s board limited its role in system-building to non-advocacy work and focused instead on building and strengthening what it described as the nine components of a comprehensive “early care and education” system in Ohio (the terminology for which has since evolved to “early childhood development”), which are illustrated below.



The board’s work did not occur in isolation, nor does the system-building work that has continued with the Early Childhood Cabinet and with plans for the CECD. Over the last decade, many planning and system building activities, inclusive of hundreds of stakeholders, have occurred. In 2009, the CECD Implementation Plan builds upon content of the Strategic Framework<sup>4</sup>, the School Readiness Solutions Group’s recommendations<sup>5</sup> and implementation strategies<sup>6</sup>, and Build Ohio work plans, and with input from the Ohio GroundWork Campaign, Policy Matters Ohio, cabinet-level workgroups, and the Early Childhood Advisory Council.

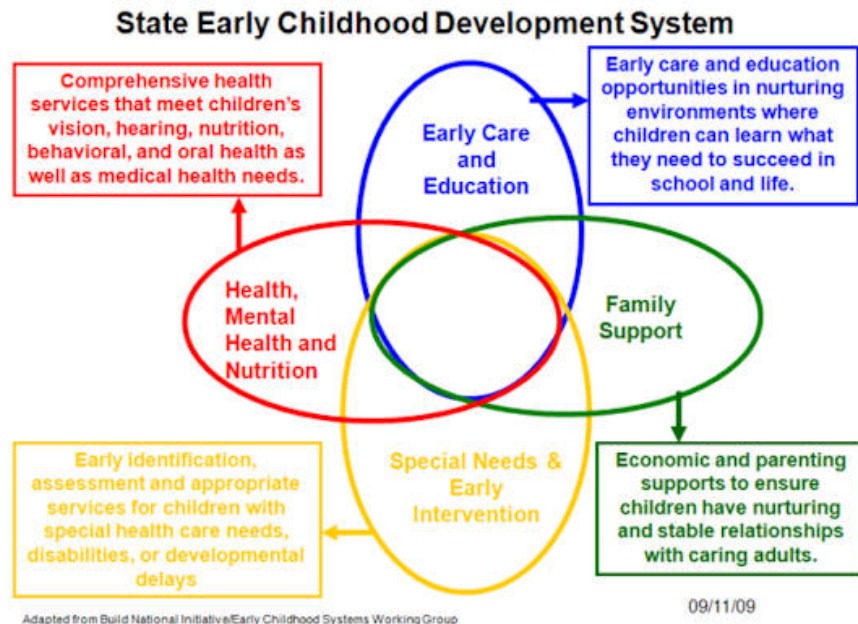
<sup>4</sup> *Strategic Framework: Building an Early Learning System for Ohio’s Young Children* (2003). A set of 10-year goals and milestones developed by an early learning and finance reform working group, with the support of Action for Children and Ohio’s Child Care Resource and Referral Association.

<sup>5</sup> *From the Beginning: Firm Footing for Children, Families, and Schools* (2006). A set of recommendations related to the rules, roles, and relationships that define Ohio’s early learning services.

<sup>6</sup> *Giving Children a Chance: Strategies for Implementing Ohio’s School Readiness Agenda* (2007)

## Center for Early Childhood Development Framework

Ohio adopted a nationally developed framework and set of core elements to explain its comprehensive early childhood development system in the context of the new CECD. The framework was first developed by the Early Childhood Systems Working Group and is well known to the Build Initiative. It describes an early childhood development system as a set of interrelated parts that work together toward a common goal: ensuring the healthy growth and optimal development of young children in the context of their families.



The core elements that make up Ohio's Early Childhood Development System mirror those first articulated by Build Ohio. They include:

- **Accountability.** Ohio's early childhood development accountability system collects child and program data needed to inform policy, assess program effectiveness, ensure investments are used wisely, enhance professional practices, and link to other data systems and evaluation efforts.
- **Communication.** Families and communities have access to information regarding the services and supports available to promote the healthy development of children and families.
- **Financing.** Ohio's financing system provides stable funding that is sufficient to support and sustain services and quality enhancements required for an effective, coherent, and equitable early childhood development system.
- **Governance.** Ohio's governance and administrative structures have the authority and responsibility to oversee, implement, and coordinate state-funded or state-administered early childhood programs and services for children and their families.

- **Professional development.** Ohio's early childhood development professionals access professional development opportunities and ongoing supports that build their knowledge, competencies, and skills for supporting expectant mothers, children, and families.
- **Quality standards.** Early childhood development standards for all professionals, programs, and services promote the optimal development and learning of young children.
- **Regulation.** Ohio's regulations for early childhood development programs and professionals promote the protection and healthy development of young children.
- **Services.** High quality, family-centered programs and supports are available, acceptable, accessible, and affordable within communities.

# Actions and Achievements

## Accomplishments within the Context of the CECD Framework

The previous section of this case study identified the core elements that make up Ohio's early childhood development framework and plan for the CECD. With these elements in mind, the following bullets highlight significant actions and achievements that have contributed to the overall goal of systems-building in Ohio in 2009.

### Accountability

- Ohio recognizes that a key accountability component of an early childhood development system is the ability of state agencies to link and track children's program experiences, progress, and development. In 2009, the charge of the Early Childhood Cabinet's Early Childhood Interagency Child Identifier Work Group was to propose using a single, unique identification number for children entering Ohio's early childhood programs and to identify the issues that state agencies will need to address to implement this approach. At this writing, the CECD Implementation Plan recommends the creation of such an identifier, which will require legislative action to execute.
- Ohio continues to plan for and build greater data accountability within its early childhood development system. Plans for the CECD include convening a workgroup that will identify performance measures for the system, and that will build upon previous work from the Ohio Family and Children First Council<sup>7</sup>, the School Readiness Indicators Initiative<sup>8</sup>, and the School Readiness Solutions Group.

### Communication

- During budget negotiations within the House and Senate, when the status of many early childhood programs was still unclear, members of the Early Childhood Cabinet, the Early Childhood Advisory Council, GroundWork, and Voices for Ohio's Children hosted numerous information sessions to keep providers and parents informed.
- When funding for Ohio's Early Learning Initiative (ELI) was eliminated, a transition plan was developed that allowed children enrolled in ELI to continue to receive services, and in many cases, receive financial assistance through Ohio's Subsidized Child Care Program. Communication with parents was ongoing through this process.
- Stakeholders and other interested parties had several opportunities throughout the year to receive information and provide comment on plans for the creation of the CECD. The Early Childhood Cabinet presented information to groups of internal and external stakeholders, and made this information available on the Build Ohio website to solicit

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<sup>7</sup> *Ohio's Child Well-Being Indicators and Data Sources* (2007) from the Partnerships for Success Academy and the OFCF Child Well-Being Indicators Data Committee

<sup>8</sup> *Getting Ready* (2004) from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative

additional comment. Once a draft proposal for the Center was created, it too was posted on the Build Ohio website to gather stakeholder feedback.

- Communication and marketing are intended to be core functions of the CECD with the goal of increasing understanding and knowledge of the importance and value of investments in early learning and child development. Plans call for internal and external communication strategies, development of key messages, and marketing and distribution of publications.

### Financing

- An Early Childhood Financing Workgroup has been established and is currently at work crafting recommendations for the implementation of a single financing system for early care and education programs.
- The Early Childhood Cabinet also has a Part C/Early Intervention Workgroup that is defining core services and providing recommendations to comprehensively fund and improve the delivery of those services.
- The CECD Implementation Plan recommends development of a FY 2012-2013 budget that would be specific to early childhood.

### Governance

- A primary reason for locating the new CECD within ODE is to formally align early childhood programs within a P-20 framework. In terms of a governance structure, this means that the CECD falls under the governance of Ohio's State Board of Education – a 19-member body comprising 11 elected officials and 8 members who are appointed by the Governor. The State Board, in turn, appoints Ohio's Superintendent of Public Instruction, who oversees ODE.
- The State Board, until very recently, has been largely unknown to members of the early childhood field (and vice versa). In 2009, relationships have begun to be established between and among members of the State Board, Early Childhood Cabinet, CECD Transition Teams, and the ECAC. In addition, the CECD Implementation Plan recommends that the State Board of Education create an early childhood committee, and that two members of the ECAC serve as ex officio members.
- The CECD's administrative structure will reflect the current configuration of ODE. The CECD will be one of six centers within the department. The CECD Director will report directly to the Superintendent and to the Governor and will be advised by the ECAC. This dual-reporting structure is unique to the CECD (other center directors report only to the Superintendent), and among early childhood advocates, is considered a critical piece to preserving the unique and comprehensive focus of early childhood programs and recognizing that early childhood is a separate system from K-12 (though they are logically linked).

## Professional development

- Ohio continues to provide financial support and technical assistance to child care programs that have achieved star-rating in Step Up to Quality (SUTQ), Ohio's voluntary child care rating system. In FY 2009, 307 teachers statewide were working toward associate degrees via assistance from T.E.A.C.H. scholarships, which pay a portion of tuition and book costs.
- Step Up to Quality requires annual specialized training for teachers, assistant teachers, and program administrators. In the last ten years, the number of training sessions offered by local Resource and Referral agencies has nearly tripled. In FY 2009, a total of 47,691 early childhood professionals received specialized training, compared to 26,230 in FY 2008.
- Ohio is one of more than 25 states to operate a registry for early childhood professionals. Professionals use this web-based system to track their education and training. In FY 2009, the number of registrants to the Ohio Professional Development Registry was 26,803 – nearly double the number in 2008 (14,000).
- In March 2009, SPARK Ohio was spotlighted for its strong evaluation and scaling efforts during a forum held in Washington D.C.. SPARK was commended for its effectiveness in getting young children ready for kindergarten and for its leadership in the Ohio Ready Schools Initiative. What began as a small pilot project has grown into a statewide effort to support elementary school principals. Replication sites throughout the state are flourishing; children, families, and schools are benefiting in their communities; and sites are attracting both media attention and community donations.
- The CECD Implementation Plan recommends connecting ODE's STARS system for licensed teachers with the Professional Development Registry in order to update and share information regarding the early childhood workforce.

## Quality standards

- Ohio is currently in the process of developing quality program standards for home visitation models under Help Me Grow (HMG). The process has involved a year-long review of HMG, which took place in 2008, and hearing and public comment periods for policy revisions crafted in 2009. A series of forums are also being held with nurse practitioners and others who conduct home visits to gather feedback about the impact of state policies on various service delivery models.
- Ohio was also one of four states to receive a Pew Home Visiting Campaign grant, which supports implementation of evidence-based home visiting practices.
- The Ohio Professional Development Network has continued to build upon the family of documents under Ohio's Core Knowledge and Competencies, including completion of an Instructor's Guide, Social Emotional Field Guide, and an Administrator's Core Knowledge and Competencies document.

- The Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council is currently examining promising/best practices related to family engagement, and will be generating recommendations by Fall 2010.
- The CECD Implementation Plan recommends creation of birth-to-five content and program standards that reflect all domains of childhood development, and that build upon standards that exist, but that currently apply to different programs within the early childhood system (birth-to-three standards for ODJFS-licensed programs and three-to-five standards for ODE-licensed programs). Current documents include Ohio's *Infant and Toddler Guidelines, Standards for the Care and Teaching of Ohio Infants and Toddlers, Early Learning Program Guidelines, and Early Learning Content Standards*.

### Services

- In 2009, SUTQ exceeded its state fiscal year goal of 800 star-rated programs. The goal was reached by May, and by December the number of star-rated programs exceeded 1,000.
- In 2009, SUTQ also implemented provider incentives for star-rated programs that serve low-income children. Providers with 1-star, 2-star, and 3-star ratings receive a 5%, 10%, and 15% increase to their child care subsidies, respectively, in recognition of the higher costs associated with maintaining quality services for children and families. (Formerly, all star-rated centers received 5%.)
- Despite substantial budget reductions, Ohio maintained an outtake level of 200% of FPL for low-income families currently enrolled in subsidized child care (eligibility for new families was reduced to 150%).
- Ohio also maintained the definitions of full-time, part-time and hourly care by implementing cuts in the provider rate for subsidized child care (25 hours is considered full-time care).
- Following the elimination of ELI, eight weeks of transitional services were provided to families that had been enrolled in the program. This allowed approximately 4,500 children to transition to kindergarten and another 7,500 to transition to subsidized child care.
- Although the scope of funded services under HMG was limited to first-time, vulnerable families and/or families with children who have identified delays or disabilities, increased GRF investment in HMG will allow Ohio to leverage federal Medicaid dollars to increase services to Ohioans.

# Infrastructure Development

## State Planning and Capacity Development

Over the course of about six months, the Early Childhood Cabinet focused most of its time and efforts on the creation of the CECD Implementation Plan. Two working groups were developed for this work. The Policy Team determined the vision, principles, and strategic direction of the Center. The Operations Team collected information on the “as is” status of staffing, funding, IT support systems, facilities, and equipment invested in Ohio’s current early childhood system and developed a map of all of these resources (the “As Is” State Matrix referenced in the *Recognition of Need* section of this case study.) Then, as the Policy Team defined the vision and policy direction of the Center, the Operations Team began crafting the plan for implementation, which is expected to begin in July 2010. The transition is recommended to occur in three phases, which are described below.

- **Phase 1: Transfer of Programs, Services, and Funding.** The Operations Team spent considerable time clarifying and coming to a shared understanding of which programs, services, and funding streams should be transferred to the CECD, based on the system components and elements contained in each program. In stage 1, programs and services that are specifically designed and funded to serve expectant mothers and children to the point of kindergarten entry, will transfer. These are:
  - (1) From ODE, all public preschool programs, child care licensing, Head Start Collaboration, the Ready Schools Initiative, and the Even Start Family Literacy Program
  - (2) From ODJFS, all child care services (resource and referral, county quality allocations, licensing, professional development, Ready to Learn PBS, and Step Up to Quality)
  - (3) From ODH, Help Me Grow, Healthy Child Care Ohio, and the ECCS grant
  - (4) From ODMH, early childhood mental health consultation services and maternal depression and social/emotional screenings
  - (5) From ODMRDD, early intervention consultants and specialist certifications
- **Phase 2: Identification of Additional Programs and Services.** The Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services will join the five agencies listed above to continue collaboration and implementation of the programs and services identified in Phase 1. In addition, programs and services related to family supports, health, behavioral health, and nutrition will be identified either for transfer or interagency collaboration. It is also recommended that ODH transfer its autism screening project, and that ODJFS transition child care policy development regarding eligibility and certification to the CECD.

- **Phase 3: Transfer of Child Care Subsidy Payment System.** Once a reliable and sustainable financing system and integrated data system are in place, ODJFS' child care subsidy payment system will transfer to the CECD. This transition would assure alignment within and between the early childhood development and the K-12 public education systems, as well as health, child welfare, and other state and local social service systems.

The Early Childhood Cabinet will remain in existence at least until the CECD transition is complete. Once the Center is fully operational, the Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council will be responsible for the coordination of services for all children, prenatal to age 24 (as it has current statutory authority to do).

The success of the CECD Implementation Plan relies upon leaders from each of the state agencies involved in the transfer of programs and services to work closely together to assure that processes are implemented systematically. They must also keep at the forefront of their work, the desired results for the Center, which include:

- Existence of a new administrative home for the early childhood development system that reflects a single vision, strategic direction and decision-making authority
- Efficient and effective delivery of the best possible services to expectant mothers, families and children from birth to kindergarten entry
- Consistent and coherent policies that strengthen collaboration and integration
- Operational and financial accountability and sustainability
- Increased access of the target population to acceptable, affordable, and available services
- Functionality as a cohesive, interconnected system that ensure collaboration among state and local programs and agencies.

## **Local Planning and Governance Structures**

### Early Childhood Advisory Council

In 2009, the ECAC was formally established in the Ohio Revised Code (though it was convened 2008). The ECAC was established to serve several functions; first, to meet the requirements of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, which required governors to designate or establish a State Advisory Council on early childhood education and care; and second, to merge the functions and responsibilities of the former Build Ohio board, the governor's early childhood transition resource group, and the Head Start Advisory group.

The ECAC is a 45-member council with members representing schools, pediatricians, health departments, advocacy/membership associations, HMG providers, local boards of DD, Head Start providers, for-profit and non-profit early care and education providers, early childhood mental health providers, and funders. In 2009, the ECAC added to its membership to include a

representative from the Ohio Business Roundtable (thanks to the Partnership for America's Economic Success) and a member of the State Board of Education.

Also in 2009, funding to support the work of early childhood advisory councils in Ohio and other states has been made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). As part of its application for funding, the ECAC has devised the following three-year goals and objectives:

- Strengthen the capacity of the ECAC to influence the policy direction of the early childhood system
- Support the development of the new CECD
- Increase the overall participation of children in new or existing early childhood programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations
- Support the development and implementation of high quality early childhood standards that are inclusive of birth-entry into kindergarten, aligned with K-12, and intentionally include all areas of development
- Establish a statewide, unified data collection and accountability system

#### Other Local Planning Initiatives/Changing Landscapes

As plans for the CEDC are implemented and changes/adjustments are instituted at the state level, other adjustments will occur at the local level. For example:

- **Help Me Grow Advisory Council.** The Help Me Grow Advisory Council is an interagency coordinating council composed of stakeholders and service providers, including parents, state and local agencies, and medical professionals. Its role is to provide direction and guidance in policy and program implementation issues related to HMG. Currently, the advisory council makes its recommendations to the lead agency for Part C services in Ohio, which is ODH. After HMG transitions to the CECD, the advisory council will advise the Center Director.
- **Child Care Advisory Council.** The CECD Implementation Plan also recommends that the Child Care Advisory Council be rescinded and replaced with an Early Care and Education workgroup that is established by the CECD. Currently, the Child Care Advisory Council is housed within ODJFS and consists of representatives from licensed child care centers and Head Start centers, Type A and B home providers, county agencies, parents, and other early childhood stakeholders. Its role is to advise ODJFS on licensing of centers, Type A homes, and certification of Type B homes and in-home aides. The intent of creating an Early Care and Education workgroup would be to advise the Governor and the CECD on the delivery of early care and education services across all settings and age groups.

- **Coordination roles.** In order to promote coordination and linkages of the early childhood system with other systems and services, the CECD Implementation Plan recommends creating an Executive Assistant position for Early Childhood Development within the governor's office. This person would then participate on the Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council. The Director of the CECD is also recommended to participate on the Ohio Family and Children First Deputies Group.

# Political Mobilization and Advocacy

## Budget Campaigns

### GroundWork and Voices for Ohio's Children

In 2009, early childhood advocacy organizations rallied their existing members and spent tireless hours recruiting new advocates to preserve as much funding for early childhood programs as possible. Ohio's GroundWork Campaign and Voices for Ohio's Children hosted numerous conference calls (as often as weekly) to provide updates and analysis on recent budget developments. The groups organized rallies at the Statehouse, and distributed "sign on" letters to the Governor, to House and Senate leadership, and to Ohio's Congressional Delegation. The organizations' websites were constant sources of information. Key staff traveled to Washington to lobby for additional assistance in the form of TANF and other federal dollars.

### The Campaign to Protect Ohio's Future

The Campaign to Protect Ohio's Future is a coalition of health, human services, primary and secondary education, and higher education organizations that advocate for adequate and/or restored funding for human service providers. In 2009, the Campaign distributed a survey to human service providers to ask what impact recent budget cuts have had on their organizations and their ability to provide services.

A total of 481 providers completed the survey, with the largest percentage coming from child care/ELI programs (194 programs). Of all respondents, 71% said that their provision of core services have been negatively affected by cuts in state funding, 42% have had to cut staff, 42% have curtailed programs and/or limited participation, 28% have closed programs or locations, 39% have eliminated or cancelled programs, 40% have served fewer constituents, 26% have had to turn constituents away without services, and 14% have reduced their hours or days of operation. Many, however, are willing to share their experiences with others and spread the word about the impact of budget cuts on the services they provide. Of all respondents, 79% said they have already communicated with the Governor and/or with state representatives. Another 67% said they were willing to share their experiences and observations with elected officials, and 54% said they would share these with the media.

## Budget Successes, Despite Losses

In 2009, Ohio faced the challenge of having to fill an estimated \$3.2 billion hole in FY 2010-2011 budget legislation. Few agencies and programs were spared multiple rounds of budget cuts. In total, funding for early care and education programs was reduced by \$281 million, with significant reductions in TANF funding for ELI and HMG as the largest part of that reduction. Funding for ELI and Early Childhood Mental Health Treatment programs was completely eliminated. The child care program was restructured to reduce eligibility and the reimbursement

rate for providers, while maintaining the definitions of full-time, part-time, and hourly care. Also, HMG received a 40% reduction in funding and was restructured to focus on low-income, first-time parents and to achieve standardization of the HMG model statewide. Despite that, some successes can be claimed:

- **Legislative champions.** GroundWork has had success cultivating several key legislative champions for issues related to early childhood programs and funding, including several who hold key positions on the House and Senate Finance committees, the Assistant Majority Whip in the House, and the Minority Leader in the Senate.
- **Increased GRF commitment for early childhood programs.** One-time TANF funding that was made available to early childhood programs during the FY 2008-2009 budget cycle was no longer available in FY 2010-2011. Without increases in scarce GRF revenue, the total loss to the early childhood arena would have amounted to more than \$400 million. Instead, GRF funding was increased by \$176 million.
- **Secured funding for SCHIP.** Ohio's planned expansion of SCHIP eligibility from 200% to 300% of FPL was included in the budget, with a portion of the state's tobacco settlement dollars dedicated as funding.
- **Full-day kindergarten.** A mandate to implement all-day kindergarten in all districts across the state was included in H.B. 1. Many district superintendents objected to this provision, citing resource and space limitations. A new bill passed after the budget, however, set a deadline for every district to implement all-day kindergarten by the 2012 school year.

## Federal Recognition

In December 2009, Dr. Joan Lombardi, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Inter-Departmental Liaison for Early Childhood Development at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, visited with early childhood leaders and advocates in Ohio. She met with the Early Childhood Cabinet, Governor Strickland's senior staff, the Transition Team members of the CECD, and with approximately 200 advocates, providers, and consumers from across Ohio who came to hear her speak.

Dr. Lombardi's work in Washington is bringing together child welfare, mental health, Head Start, and trauma programs to ensure that there is a concerted effort to have these systems work together. At the encouragement of early childhood advocates in Ohio, several of whom sit on the Early Childhood Advisory Council, Dr. Lombardi came to Ohio to see the work that has been happening around the creation of the CECD, health care expansion, and early childhood mental health. Her visit is testament to the fact that Ohio is on the right path, and that Ohio's focus on creating a family-centered, high quality early childhood system that focuses programs and services on the needs of the whole child is recognized as a best practice among those in Washington working to spread the same message at the federal level.

# Public Awareness and Support

## Raising Awareness

### Cabinet Advocacy

In many ways, the Early Childhood Cabinet is the political “face” of early childhood system building efforts in Ohio. Throughout 2009, and especially during the budget process, the Cabinet worked to raise awareness about the importance of thinking strategically and systematically about the role of early childhood in the larger preK-to-higher education continuum.

Early in 2009, the Cabinet Director, Alicia Leatherman, helped facilitate several meetings with the Early Childhood Advisory Council to gather their feedback, priorities, and vision for what a single, administrative structure for early childhood development could look like in Ohio. These priorities are reflected in the current plan for the CECD and have been communicated again and again, in multiple venues, and to multiple groups of stakeholders.

During the budget process, the Cabinet also penned a series of Op Ed pieces in newspapers across the state. These articles highlighted the importance of early childhood programs and services and the need to develop a comprehensive system of early childhood development that consists of a strong infrastructure, appropriate funding, and high quality services and supports.

### Bad News, but Good Coverage

As budget resolutions and funding cuts started to become clear, providers, advocates, and parents watching from the field took their concerns to the press. Rumors about the elimination of ELI and proposed changes to the definition of full-time care frequently sparked interest and debate. But even as voices were raised in alarm, the message about the value of accessible, affordable, high quality early learning experiences was communicated across the state. A sample of newspaper article excerpts demonstrates this:

*The evidence is quite strong that quality early-childhood education services benefit all children, especially those in low-resource families.* – Deborah Delisle, Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction

*Children who experience quality early education are 20 percent more likely to graduate from high school, 23 percent more likely to attend higher education, 50 percent less likely to become a teen parent, and significantly less likely to participate in criminal activity.* – Katie Kelly, Director of GroundWork

*We need to get children ready to learn.*— Sen. John Carey, Republican Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee

*The evidence is clear: An investment in high-quality programs that support the very youngest of children and the adults who care for them is one of the smartest we can make. Everything that we invest now is returned exponentially as children enter kindergarten ready to learn, experience academic success and less remediation, and enter the work force as productive and valuable employees. – Ronald A. Rice, Medina, OH*

*In order for these children to shed the shackles of poverty, they must be afforded a quality education. These at-risk children deserve a chance to succeed, not only for their own sake, but also for the future prosperity of our state.— Eric Burdick, Miamisburg, OH*

*The programs address the health and cognitive-development needs of low-income children in order to give them the comprehensive services they need to break the cycle of poverty. The elimination of early learning initiatives is an example of choices that will keep us in the same position we are in today — watching as companies flee our state and wondering why our last-minute scrambling to create incentives is not effective. – Jenni Roer, member of the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council executive committee*

### Kids Talk Statehouse Series

In 2009, Voice for Ohio's Children began hosting a Kids Talk Statehouse Series to inform and educate policymakers and staff on the issues that impact the safety and wellbeing of Ohio's children and their families. Topics include children's health (including an overview of early childhood mental health, HMG, and children's Medicaid/CHIP coverage); early childhood education (with guest speaker Alicia Leatherman talking about the plans for the CECD); after-school and out-of-school time; behavioral health; tax policies and working families; and child welfare. Each briefing features an overview of the policy or issue area, a discussion of the issue from the perspective of youth and families, and a panel of public policy partners who work in the issue area.

## **Building Support**

In 2009, the degree to which early learning system building is a politically and socially supported issue can be measured in several ways:

- **Participation in political rallies and events.** Over the course of six months, GroundWork, Voice for Ohio's Children, and their many member advocates put forth tremendous effort communicating their concerns about early childhood funding level to legislators. In those six months, GroundWork members:
  - Sent more than 3,000 letters to the House, Senate, and Governor;
  - Made at least 1,000 phone calls to legislators and the Governor;

- Contacted every member of the legislature through one-on-one meetings, emails, and phone calls;
- Testified on behalf of early childhood programs in House and Senate committees (30 members);
- Attended the early childhood support rally on the Statehouse lawn (250 members).
- **Feedback gathered from CECD implementation plans.** Beginning in 2009, individuals interested in receiving regular updates about what is happening in the field of early childhood in Ohio can register for these via the Build Ohio website. Currently, there are 522 names on this list with more added every week. While plans were developing for the creation of the CECD, the website was used to post PowerPoint presentations about the Center, summaries of Transition Team meetings, and other information. Once a draft version of the CECD Implementation Plan was available, this too was posted on the website. In a matter of six days, 268 people posted comments and feedback about the plan.
- **Attendance at ECAC information sessions.** As the Early Childhood Advisory Council is preparing to submit its application for funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, members hosted three sessions in December (in Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati) with stakeholders to gather feedback about the Council's three-year goals and objectives. In total, more than 200 people from across the state attended these sessions and provided comments and suggestions on topics related to parental supports and engagement, professional development, the need for accountability (for both the system and the ECAC), dedicated funding, and system linkages.

## Alignment and Readiness for a Big Leap Forward

In Ohio, the early childhood field has long been challenged with multiple programs across many systems, which historically, has made alignment of services to children and families difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. The Ohio Departments of Education, Job and Family Services, Health, Mental Health, MRDD, and others all oversee early childhood programs and services. In practice, this has meant that families with young children who are involved in multiple programs have faced conflicting rules and regulations and unclear points of entry and requirements.

Under the proposed implementation plan, the CECD will have the authority and responsibility of implementing and coordinating early childhood programs and services for children, from prenatal to kindergarten entry. In the minds of early childhood professionals across the state, this is an incredible opportunity to build something that before now, has never existed in Ohio, and to build it in a way that supports Ohio's vision for young children: "All children are valued, healthy and happy."

The plan provides clear direction and a timeline. It also has built-in flexibility to allow agency directors and state leaders to further develop, refine, and communicate their strategy for carefully staging the Center's implementation. The plan allows for, and encourages, continued input from key constituents and staff. It even recommends a system of checks and balances to ensure that linkages and communication are constantly in place. These include:

- A dual-reporting structure, wherein the Center Director reports directly to both the Governor and the Superintendent of ODE
- The involvement of the Early Childhood Advisory Council, which will advise both the Center Director and the Governor
- A recommendation to create an Executive Assistant for Early Childhood Development who would provide consistent focus on policy priorities within the Office of the Governor
- A recommendation to appoint two members of the ECAC as ex-officio members of the State Board of Education
- A recommendation for the State Board of Education to create an early childhood committee
- A recommendation that the Governor, Superintendent, State Board leadership, and ECAC leadership meet quarterly to discuss issues that affect the early childhood development system

Finally, with the codification of the ECAC, Ohio has ensured that this geographically diverse group of citizens will be in place for the long-term to advise the state during the implementation and ongoing operation of the CECD.

## Discussion

### The Value of Build in Ohio

Ohio has made significant progress gaining consensus for Build's concept of an early childhood system that consists of four interconnected subsystems of early care and education, health/mental health/nutrition, family support, and special needs/early intervention. The framework has been adopted by the Strickland Administration and the Early Childhood Cabinet, the Early Childhood Advisory Council, the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grantee (currently, ODH), the Head Start State Collaboration Office, and others. It has been introduced to state legislators, state department leaders, providers and educators, associations, foundations, and has been the focus of early childhood advocacy campaigns in Ohio.

The importance of high-quality, safe, and nurturing early learning experiences as being integral to the success of the larger K-high education continuum is taking root. In the process of conceiving and putting together a plan for the CECD, some very honest, very thoughtful, and sometimes very difficult conversations have taken place that only a few years ago, would probably never have even started. New roles are being defined, old assumptions are being challenged, and historically "ingrained" infrastructures and agency cultures are putting change processes into motion. At the same time that doubts are being aired, hope is growing that Ohio is building an infrastructure that is focused and aligned on meeting the needs of the whole child and his/her family.

The Build Initiative's goal of ensuring that children are safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed has guided Ohio's work and has been invaluable in keeping Ohio's "eyes on the prize." This support should continue, especially during these difficult economic times when it becomes difficult for states like Ohio to justify (in the eyes of politicians) investments for "system improvements" rather than direct services. Build needs to keep the message about systems building in the forefront.

Build is also one of the few tables where early childhood advocates and leaders can receive information, support, and feedback from a group of peers that is relevant to the policy development work they do. Every state brings a wealth of knowledge and experience, which has benefited (and will continue to benefit) Ohio.

In the years ahead, Ohio will face a number of opportunities and challenges in its system-building work, generally, and in the successful transition to and smooth operation of the CECD, specifically. These are outlined below.

## Sustainability Opportunities and Challenges

### Opportunities

- **Locating the CECD within ODE.** A primary advantage to placing the Center within ODE is to align early childhood, formally, within Ohio's K-12 system and to leverage ODE's political and public commitment to public education, and the department's data and accountability infrastructure.
- **Reinforcing early childhood as critical to individual success.** Establishing the CECD reinforces early childhood development as a critical component (along with K-12 and higher education) to school and life success for every child. The creation of the Center is also consistent with the vision of building a high-quality *system* of early childhood development that other workgroups and strategy teams have recommended in the past.
- **Alignment.** The Center brings together what are currently scattered programs, staff, and resources into one administrative structure. The advantages associated with this include: one licensing system; coordinated data development; increased accountability for improved outcomes; better communication among educators, and between educators and parents; creation of a permanent, stable funding mechanism; and opportunities to share best practices from the early childhood system with the K-12 system and vice versa.

### Challenges

- **Potential change in administration.** It is not known how a change in Governor will affect the Center's implementation, if at all. However, the sentiment among many in the early childhood field is that it would be better to get the Center in place and running as smoothly as possible, as quickly as possible, lest a change in administration bring with it a change in focus.
- **Center culture.** The integration of staff and programs from multiple departments can deter, and possibly derail, advancing a high-quality early childhood development system if attention is not given to facilitating the merger of agency cultures and areas of focus. Key issues to consider include maintaining respect and support for Ohio's mixed delivery system of early childhood providers in a manner that genuinely embraces a whole child developmental approaches, and mitigating potential clashes between agency cultures – especially ODJFS & ODE, two agencies that historically, have not seen eye to eye.
- **Center leadership and governance.** A decision concerning who will lead the Center should be made quickly. Those in the early childhood field have advocated that the Center Director have knowledge, experience, and commitment to all domains of child development. The Director should be transparent, collaborative, and have strong communication skills. There is a lingering fear among the early childhood field that if the Director comes primarily from an education background, the culture and focus of the

new Center will also lean toward early care and education, to the detriment of the other three ovals in the system's framework.

- **Avoiding too narrow a focus.** The focus of the Center should strive to encompass all domains of early childhood development. The challenge will be to focus not only on cognitive development, but also on integrating physical and mental health, social/emotional development, nutrition, and other comprehensive services and community-based models of successful early childhood development.
- **Uninterrupted services.** As staff and funding begin to transfer to the Center, service delivery should continue without interruption. Providers must continue to be paid, and transitions must occur as smoothly and seamlessly as possible to avoid confusion and miscommunication to families.

## The Role of Build

In the years ahead, the Build Initiative should continue to facilitate integrative thinking among key early childhood players in Ohio. As staff and cultures from different agencies begin to mix, now more than ever, it is critical for Ohio to think holistically and to adopt more “both/and” approaches than it does “either/or” approaches.

Build should also continue to provide technical assistance and support, which has been invaluable to Ohio. Having access to flexible funding is very helpful for states that are trying to move quickly. Ohio would also benefit from assistance as it continues to define the critical elements that make up a comprehensive system of early childhood development. Especially with respect to defining the services, programs, and supports that fit into the “family support” oval.<sup>9</sup>

It would also be helpful for Build to begin looking at actual investments within the Build network. As state teams begin to engage new partners (from the business community, for example), those partners often want to know how the state “stacks up” in terms of investments. Currently, there is not a place for states to get that information. Now that states have (more or less) adopted a common definition of the “early childhood system,” it could be an opportune time to begin talking about funding levels (both state and federal investments).

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<sup>9</sup> The CECD Implementation Plan, as written, is still a bit vague about defining these services. In phase 2, the plan says “agencies will identify the programs and services related to family supports, health, behavioral health and nutrition that will be transferred to the Center or that require clearly established interagency collaboration for policy development and implementation.”