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Survey on Early Childhood Advisory Councils

During fall 2007, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) surveyed states regarding the presence and nature of state early childhood coordinating councils, which may exist as Early Learning Councils, Task Forces, Children's Cabinets, Interagency Coordinating Councils, etc. For brevity, these coordinating entities are referred to below as Early Childhood Advisory Councils (ECACs). The survey data will inform the NGA Center's support activities for governor's policy advisors and ECAC leaders, including policy briefs, quarterly conference calls, and a policy retreat in 2008. This Backgrounder offers a summary snapshot of the survey results.

Survey Population

The NGA Center contacted the governors' offices in all 50 states and U.S. territories to determine whether the state has an ECAC and to identify an appropriate individual to respond to an online survey. Thirty-six states responded to the online survey. Of these,

- Thirty-one reported that an ECAC exists in the state (six reported having multiple coordinating entities), and
- Five reported that no ECAC exists in the state.

The following results reflect the responses of the **31 states reporting at least one existing ECAC**. Respondents in states with more than one coordinating entity were asked to provide information on the entity that has primary responsibility for coordinating birth -to-five early care and education services in the state.

Establishment, Membership and Funding

There are some commonalities among ECACs in terms of when they were established, where they are housed, who serves as members, and how they are funded.

Establishment

- About half of ECACs were established through an act of the state legislature (52 percent), and about a quarter were established by executive order (23 percent). Nearly two-thirds of ECACs were established after 2000 (68 percent).
- The majority of ECACs exist either as a stand-alone entity (42 percent) or within the department of human services (32 percent).
- About half of ECACs report to the governor's office (55 percent) and about one-third report to the state legislature (32 percent) and/or to the state department of human services (32 percent).

Membership

The five most common members of an ECAC are:

- State Child Care Administrators (97 percent);
- Health Care Administrators (94 percent);
- State Pre-Kindergarten Administrators (81 percent);
- Representatives of state network of child care resource and referral agencies (77 percent); and
- Representatives of professional development provider organizations (74 percent).

Funding

ECACs often combine resources from several state agencies and/or grants to meet their program and service needs.

- While half of ECACs are funded at or below \$500,000 (49 percent), several respondents could not specify the entity's funding amount (16 percent) or reported that the ECAC is not funded (16 percent).
- The top funding source for ECACs (61 percent) is in-kind state agency contributions (e.g., staff time, meeting space), followed by state general funds (36 percent), private donations/grants (36 percent), and/or federal child care development block grant dollars (23 percent).
- Nearly half of the ECACs (45 percent) identified a range of "other" sources, such as:
 - Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
 - State Early Childhood Comprehensive Services Grants;
 - Tobacco settlement dollars, tobacco taxes, or state lottery dollars; or
 - Head Start State Collaboration Office Grants.

Priorities and Activities

Coordination is the primary focus of most ECACs, and most activities relate to professional development, early learning outcomes and standards, and assessing the availability of high-quality birth- to-five services in the state.

Priorities

- All ECACs surveyed seek to increase coordination with early education and care programs/services (100 percent), and most coordinate with health (97 percent), mental health (90 percent), home visiting (90 percent), and early intervention/special education (87 percent) services.
- Almost all ECACs identify or address barriers to integrating federal and state early education and care services (90 percent).
- Most ECACs coordinate with the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) grant initiative funded by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau (81 percent).
- Over half of ECACs coordinate with the P-16 or P-20 Education Council in the state (58 percent). About a quarter of respondents reported that the ECAC does not coordinate (26 percent), or they do not know whether the ECAC coordinates (20 percent) with the P-16 or P-20 Council.

Activities

The most commonly reported ECAC activities include the following.

- Almost all ECACs develop statewide professional development or career ladder plans for early care and education (92 percent) and assist two- and four-year higher education institutions with articulation agreements (92 percent).
- Most ECACs focus on early learning outcomes and standards (77 percent), communication (77 percent), professional development and training (74 percent), technical assistance (71 percent) and service coordination (71 percent).
- Nearly three-quarters of ECACs assess the availability of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs to low-income children in the state (74 percent). Similarly, most ECACs assess the availability of high-quality child care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in the state (74 percent).
- Over half assess the availability of other early childhood development services in the state, such as health, mental health, and home visiting (52 percent).

Technical Assistance Needs

Including the responses of states without ECACs, states indicated a need for technical assistance in the areas of coordination and governance (75 percent); early childhood assessments (61 percent); quality improvement (56 percent); and professional development (53 percent).