

St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Council

Overview: Mission, Functions, Membership, Structure and Key Issues

February 2011

A. Mission/Purpose

The St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Council will develop a community vision for a comprehensive system that addresses the full range of early childhood needs for all St. Louis area children. Council members will work jointly to achieve that vision, implementing and coordinating policies and programs in collaboration with involved systems, programs, and initiatives all playing their appropriate roles.

B. Functions of the Council

- Assessment and identification of service gaps and policy needs
- Establishment of a centralized data bank on early childhood indicators
- Identification of evidenced-based “best practice” approaches
- Development of action strategies to establish a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood system
- Identification of funding opportunities to implement action strategies
- Establishment and measurement of outcome goals for initiatives of the Council
- Coordination of community efforts related to all aspects of early childhood development

C. Membership – The Council will work to engage all key stakeholders in the St. Louis region involved in addressing critical early childhood issues and needs. Initial participants in discussions related to formation of the Council have included:

- City of St. Louis Mayor’s Early Childhood Initiative
- Early childhood component of P-20 Council
- Pre-K Initiative, Missouri Coalition for School Readiness (Pew & Pre-K Now)
- Missouri Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan – St. Louis Region
- St. Louis Public Schools
- Child Day Care Association
- St. Louis Metropolitan YWCA – Head Start
- Parents as Teachers National Center
- Department of Human Services, City of St. Louis
- ARCHS
- Grace Hill Head Start and Neighborhood Services
- Maternal, Child & Family Health Coalition
- United Services
- United Way of Greater St. Louis
- City of St. Louis Children’s Environmental Health
- Deaconess Foundation
- St. Louis Mental Health Board
- St. Louis Community College
- St. Louis County Economic Council

- St. Louis Family and Community Partnership
- St. Louis Public Schools Foundation
- Center for Violence & Injury Prevention, Washington University
- Beyond Housing, 24:1 initiative
- Vision for Children at Risk

D. Structure of the Council

Beyond the initial participants involved in the discussions to establish the St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Council, it is anticipated that the general membership for the Council could range up to 100. A Council of that size will require a Governing Committee to expedite decision-making and move formation and operations of the Council forward. A **Governing Committee** of up to 20 people will be established to direct the St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Council.

The following program committees will be established initially to pursue the work of the Council. Subcommittees may be established to address specific issues within each of the areas addressed by the program committees.

1. Environmental Scan/Data Systems
2. Early Childhood Care and Education, addressing the following issues:
 - Program Standards/Quality Improvement
 - School Readiness/Child Outcomes/Screening and Assessment
 - Professional Development
3. Early Childhood Health and Mental Health
4. Public Awareness, Advocacy & Human Capital Development
5. Community Resources and Family Engagement, with the following projects
 - Five-by-Five Enrichment Passport
 - Early Childhood Community Resource Center
 - Parenting Skills and Strengthening Families

In addition to the Governing Committee and program committees, a **Structure and Governance Committee** has been established to address key organizational issues related to formation of the Council. The Structure and Governance Committee will cease its operations when all the other organizational elements of the Council have been put in place. The Governing Committee and individual program committees will address issues related to funding and sustainability as appropriate.

E. Key Issues and Needs to Be Addressed

There is a long list of key issues and needs related to establishment of a strategic, coordinated system for addressing early childhood needs in the St. Louis region and states of Missouri and Illinois. Issues that will be addressed in the environmental scan and then prioritized by the Council include the following:

1. **Establishing a Coordinated Mechanism for Strategic Planning, Policy-Making, & Implementation**
 - Establishing and providing support to a St. Louis Regional Early Childhood Development Council

- Establishing mechanisms for implementing elements of a coordinated early childhood system in individual jurisdictions and service delivery systems
- Coordinating local initiatives with Missouri Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Plan
- Establishing an early childhood data and information system

2. Ensuring an Adequate Supply of Quality Child Care

- Streamlining local licensing and regulatory processes
- Updating Missouri child care licensing regulations
- Establishing quality standards for programs
- Reimbursing child care providers at a reasonable/market rate
- Supporting quality improvement for existing facilities
- Promoting professional development of early childhood educators (education and pay)
- Establishing a quality rating system

3. Promoting Financial Access to Quality Care

- Expanding eligibility for child care assistance
- Providing adequate child care assistance to families and service providers

4. Supporting School Readiness: Establishing an Educational Pipeline with Benchmarks, Alignment, & Accountability

- Making voluntary pre-kindergarten programs available to all children who can benefit
- Establishing and employ benchmarks for early childhood development
- Assessing all children to determine if benchmarks are met
- Providing needed follow-up and support services
- Holding early childhood development programs and systems accountable for meeting benchmarks

5. Linking Children and Families to Needed Support and Enrichment Services

- Using hospital contact at birth to provide developmental information and link families to safety and developmental resources
- Promoting participation in Parents as Teachers program
- Providing enrichment opportunities for high risk/high need children and families
- Connecting children to educational and cultural resources in the community
- Support services for teen parents

6. Conducting Pilot Early Childhood Initiatives in High Need Areas

- Universal screening/assessment
- Increase PAT service provision
- Community-based enrichment opportunities

7. Promoting Early Childhood as a Human Capital Strategy for Regional Economic Development

- Conducting public education activities
- Raising community awareness of link between well-being of children and broader community
- Engaging business and civic leaders

8. Addressing Legislative Needs and Coordination with State Agency Operations

- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plans
- State legislative needs