



Action Plan: Supporting Healthy Early Childhood



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Strategic Opportunities Addressed:

- Prepare People in Kansas to Thrive in a Global Society and All Aspects of Life
- Create Opportunities and Support People in Kansas to Improve Their Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health and Well-Being

Situation:

Research shows that the first three years of life are critical in children's brain development and that effective and positive parenting along with quality child care and early education can greatly enhance a child's lifetime development. Positive, consistent and engaged parenting is necessary for positive development in the early years of a child's life and prepares them for success in school, friendships and future roles in communities. Similarly, quality childcare and early education have been linked to positive social skill development and school readiness (Burchinal & Cryer, 2003; Lester et. al, 2010). In addition, an individual's healthy growth and development into adulthood is greatly influenced by the quality of his or her early childhood (between ages 0-6) experiences.

Emerging evidence from both human and animal studies highlights the importance the stage of early childhood in brain development and for establishing the neural functions and structures that shape future cognitive social, emotional, and health outcomes (Duncan & Magnuson, 2011). Numerous researchers have documented the negative child outcomes associated with living under the poverty threshold (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), especially when poverty is experienced during the first five years of life (Duncan, Yeong Brooks-Gunn, and Smith, 1998). Also, a long line of research has confirmed that parents who live in poverty are more likely to use authoritarian and punitive parenting styles than are parents at middle-income or higher-incomes. Parents living in poverty are also less likely to have the means to provide their children with stimulating, educational experiences in the home.

In Kansas, there are 202,606 children under the age of four and 21% of those children are living in poverty. This is a 53.4% increase in the percent of children living in poverty compared to 1970. In addition, 97,821 or 48% of children under the age of six have both parents in the labor force (2012 Child Care in the State of: Kansas, Child Care Aware of America, June 2012). In 2010, 37.7% of all births in Kansas were to unmarried parents, compared to 12.2% of all births in 1980. This represents a 209% increase in the percent of Kansas babies born to unmarried parents (KS Department of Children and Families, 2012).

Parents who struggle with poverty may lack the resources to cope with the normal transitions and stresses that accompany being a parent. Lack of physical, social, and emotional resources can lead to unhealthy and harmful parenting practices which can result in out-of-home placements. In Kansas, between 5,500 and 8,500 children are receiving foster care services (Children's Alliance, 2012), and the rate of children in need of care (ie., protection services) is 8.4 as compared to 5.2 for the nation (Casey Family Programs, 2012). Improved parenting skills and access to quality childcare are effective interventions for potential parental abuse and neglect.

For all families, and especially those who live in poverty, access to quality childcare has an enormous impact on children's development. Research shows that better trained providers leads to higher quality care and more positive outcomes for children. There is a direct relationship between professionals' level of training and quality of work with children, especially in terms of the effects on children's language development, social skills, and learning (Whitebook, 1989). A provider's skill level

helps determine whether children in care are safe and have the early learning experiences they need to succeed in school. Children in the care of inadequately prepared providers spend more of their day in aimless activity and show delays in language and social development. Yet most child care providers lack the training and education needed to provide a quality environment.

Child Care Aware of America, a leader in accessible, quality childcare, recommends that childcare center directors have a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or a related field. The agency also recommends increasing the education requirements for lead teachers to a CDA credential or an associates degree in early childhood education. The agency further recommends that the annual training requirements for teachers should be 24 hours including CPR and first-aid renewal.

In Kansas, center directors do not meet Child Care Aware of America recommendations and the lead teachers in centers are only required to have a high school diploma or GED before working with children. However, Kansas changed their Statutes and Regulations, effective February 3, 2012. The new regulations require each program director, staff member, and volunteer to complete initial orientation and training within seven days of employment. Furthermore, the program director, staff, and volunteers must complete health and safety training, pediatric first aid and CPR.

Kansas currently has 983 child care centers (of which 12% are accredited) staffed by 5,160 workers. Of the 5,458 family child care homes, 1% are accredited. Consequently, there is an on-going need for trained and supported childcare workers across Kansas.

Public Value:

K-State Extension's Family and Child Development programming contributes to the healthy development of children in early childhood. Through programs that educate parents care givers and childcare providers, young children will benefit from high quality of care which decreases the risk of poor development, parental stress and out-of-home (ie., foster care, protection services) placement. Consequently, positive parenting and healthy early childhood contributes to the well-being of all Kansas communities.

Outcomes:

Short-Term:

Programs will result in short-term outcomes for parents, childcare providers and professionals/community members.

Parents, childcare providers and early care and education professionals/community members will improve their awareness, knowledge and understanding of:

- physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and communication development of children.
- the role of learning environments that meet children's needs, capabilities, and interests in order to maximize their learning potential.
- the role of healthy activities and environments in early childhood and how to establish and maintain them.
- the importance of observing and assessing what children know and can do, which will help adults develop activities that meets the children's developmental and learning needs.
- establishing and maintaining an environment that ensures children's health, safety and development.
- how important it is to establish supportive relationships with the children in their care, and to guide them as individuals, and as part of a group.

Parents will also understand the importance of:

- positive parent-child interaction (e.g. support, caring, enjoyment, decrease in hitting and neglect)
- clear and consistent communication (e.g. clear/age-appropriate directions, positive messages, decreased adult harshness, bullying and verbal abuse)

- adaptable and flexible parent practices (e.g. giving age-appropriate choices, age appropriate expectations, decreased stress and anger with parenting)

Evaluation Questions:

Parents, childcare providers and early care and education professionals/community member program participants agree that they have increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of/about:

1. Development of children in their early years (ages 0-6).
2. The role of the learning environment in early childhood education and how to establish and maintain them.
3. The role of healthy activities and environments in early childhood how to to establish and maintain them.
4. The role of observation and assessment in early childhood education.
5. The role of supportive relationships in early childhood education.

Parents will also agree that they have increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of/about:

1. Positive parent-child interaction (e.g. support, caring, enjoyment, decrease in hitting and neglect).
2. Clear and consistent communication (e.g. clear/age-appropriate directions, positive messages, decreased adult harshness, bullying and verbal abuse).
3. Adaptable/flexible parenting practices (e.g. giving age-appropriate choices, age appropriate expectations, decreased stress an anger with parenting).

Medium-Term:

Programs will result in medium-term outcomes for parents, childcare providers and professionals/community members.

Parents, childcare providers and early care and education professionals/community members will:

- apply information on physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and communication development of children, and learning patterns of individuals and groups to their work with children in their care.
 - plan, implement and evaluate programs that improve learning environments to maximize children's learning potential and meet their needs, capabilities, and interests.
 - plan, implement and evaluate programs that encourage healthy activity, eating and social-emotional development.
 - support observations and assessments which inform the development of activities that meet children's developmental and learning needs.
 - establish and maintain a healthy, nourishing and safe environments for children in early childhood.
 - establish supportive relationships with children in their care, and guide them as individuals, and as part of a group.
- **Parents** will practice:
 - positive parent-child interaction (e.g. support caring, enjoyment, decrease in hitting and neglect).
 - clear and consistent communication (e.g. clear/age-appropriate directions, positive messages, decreased adult harshness, bullying and verbal abuse).
 - adaptable/ flexible parenting practices (e.g. giving age-appropriate choices, age appropriate expectations, decreased stress and anger with parenting).

Evaluation Questions:

Parents, childcare providers and early care and education professionals/community member program participants will:

1. Apply what they have learned about the development of children in their early years (ages 0-6).
2. Improve and maintain learning environments in early childhood learning and education.
3. Improve and maintain healthy activities and environments for healthy early childhood.
4. Use observation and assessment to develop effective activities for early childhood education.
5. Supportive positive, caring relationships for early childhood learning and education.

Parents will practice:

1. Positive parent-child interaction (e.g. support, caring, enjoyment, decrease in hitting and neglect).
2. Clear and consistent communication (e.g. clear/age-appropriate directions, positive messages, decreased adult harshness, bullying and verbal abuse).
3. Adaptable/flexible parenting practices (e.g. giving age-appropriate choices, age appropriate expectations, decreased stress and anger with parenting).

Long-Term:

In Kansas, during their early years (0-6) children will have healthy development in settings where parents, caregivers and childcare providers have the skills necessary to support, enhance and sustain that development.

Children and their families will also have access to childcare centers and family childcare homes which are staffed by well trained, informed and effective childcare workers.

Evaluation Questions:

After the programs have been completed, [insert number of] parents report being more confident and able of their positive parenting practices, and [insert number of] care givers and childcare workers are better trained and equipped to support the positive growth and development of children in early childhood.

Outputs:

Program Participants

- parents and care givers of young children
- family child care home providers
- childcare center directors and staff
- community leaders

Programs

(Evidence-based programs)

- **I am Moving, I am Learning:** national Head Start curriculum to promote structured environments for movement and healthy eating. (DoD/USDA CYTTAP provides training at scheduled times during the year.)
- **Rock Solid Foundations:** Univ. of Nebraska social emotional curriculum derived from Vanderbilt University's CSEFEL program. (DoD/USDA CYTTAP provides training at scheduled times during the year.)
- **Employee ServSafe:** KSRE program delivers consistent food safety training suitable to providers involved with the preparation and serving of food.

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(Evidence-informed, minimal participant commitment - such as 1hr/1 session - programs)

- **The Best Care:** (Univ. of Arkansas). Multi-module curriculum covering topics from allergies, fruits and vegetables to child behavior and early money literacy. (Available on the KSRE "Families!" website.)
- **Better Kid Care:** (Penn State Univ.). Online modules and face-to-face training provided by Extension agents and local childcare networks.
- **Understanding Challenging Behavior and Building Positive Relationships:** (McFarland, R.). Includes teaching guide, Powerpoint presentation and additional resources.
- **Managing Challenging Behavior by Creating Supportive Environments:** (McFarland, R.). Includes teaching guide, Powerpoint presentation.
- **Basic Parenting** (Smith, C.) Comprehensive parent education program that focuses on 80 principles and skills that form the foundation for effective parenting. Web-based multi-module course available at: [www.ksu.edu/wwparent/programs/basic/](http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent/programs/basic/) (Wonder Wise Parent)
- **Responsive Discipline: a decision-making approach to guidance in parent-child relationships** (Smith, C.). Web-based multi-module course available at: [www.ksu.edu/wwparent/courses/rd/](http://www.ksu.edu/wwparent/courses/rd/) (Wonder Wise Parent)
- **Great Beginnings for Families** (Iowa State University). Contains six lessons and support materials. The six lessons are: Everyday learning; Growing and learning; Guidance and discipline; Using love and limits; Getting along; Building family

strengths 1; and Building family strengths 2.