

Quick recap

The Children's Cabinet meeting focused on several key updates and discussions. Hannah shared positive news about Maine receiving a new round of Preschool Development Grants and an additional grant for early childhood finance and governance work. Sara provided an update on the Rural Health Transformation Program, which received tentative funding of \$100.9 million annually for five years. Sheila presented detailed findings from the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYAS) 2025 data, highlighting trends in substance use, mental health, and protective factors among students. The conversation ended with discussions about the survey's methodology, comparison with other states, and the challenges of administering it every other year.

Next steps

- Preschool development grant leadership team (Ana, Leanne Larsen, Tara Williams, Stacey McCoy, Diane Nicholson): Continue needs assessment and develop a statewide vision for early care and education, including focus on mixed delivery system, workforce, and community partnerships (with support from early learning team and pre-K partnership specialist).
- Early learning team: Maintain and support two staff to facilitate and support community-level partnerships for early childhood education.
- Preschool development grant team: Provide mini-grants to 10-20 communities to build out early childhood partnerships.
- Preschool development grant team: Continue integration of early childhood data systems and pursue another use case focused on child care workforce data, in collaboration with Department of Education, Office of Child Family Services, and DOL.
- GOPIF and relevant state team: Work with two consultants over the next 2 years to review and recommend changes to early childhood policies, rules, and protocols for improved collaboration and shared decision-making.
- Sheila Nelson/Haley Pawlowski (MIAS team): Update and post 2025 MIAS infographics on the MIAS website.
- MIAS team: Work with schools in 2027 to improve survey administration structure (e.g., designated time for all students) to increase participation rates.
- All meeting participants (especially those engaging with schools): Encourage schools to take the MIAS survey and to download and use their own data reports.
- Children's Cabinet team: Develop a plan to continue the youth mentoring/Opportunity Youth initiative without the technical assistance of the Forum for Youth Investment, including upcoming meetings with Forum for Youth Investment to transition support.

Updates

Two Early Childhood Grants:

The meeting began with updates on two significant grants: a Preschool Development Grant awarded to continue early childhood systems work of almost \$2 million for 2026 and a two year \$250,000 grant to the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and Future for early childhood finance and governance. The Preschool Development Grant will focus on creating a statewide vision, maintaining staff, and supporting partnerships between early childhood education systems and elementary schools, with a particular focus on Minnesota as a model.

Rural Health Transformation Program Update

Commissioner Gagne Holmes announced that Maine received \$190 million per year over five years for the Rural Health Transformation Program, which is \$10 million less than the originally proposed

budget, but the program will still include funding for school-based health centers and other initiatives impacting children and families.

Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey

Sheila Nelson from Maine CDC presented updates on the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey data from 2025. (See attached slides)

- Sheila noted improvements in substance use trends, including decreases in combustible tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use among high school students. She noted that of those who report using alcohol, there is concern about binge drinking.
- Mental health indicators showed a slight improvement compared to 2023, with decreases in feelings of sadness and hopelessness, as well as in suicide-related behaviors among high school students. While overall mental health improved, girls still reported poorer mental health than boys, and LGBTQ+ students, particularly transgender students, faced significantly higher rates of mental health struggles, with over 40% considering suicide and 1 in 5 attempting suicide in the past year.

Sheila emphasized the importance of using MIYHS data to inform policies and support young people's well-being. She encouraged attendees to advocate for the survey's implementation in schools and to utilize the data for decision-making.

The group discussed trends in participation in the survey. Colby intern, Char Butler, shared insights from their recent high school experience, suggesting that requiring participation during designated class times could improve survey completion rates. The team addressed questions about survey administration frequency, with Sheila explaining that the biennial schedule is due to resource constraints and the significant effort required to conduct the survey over a two-month period.

Sheila explained that the MIYSH is a hybrid survey that includes questions from the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey plus additional state-specific questions. Maine's data is included in the national YRBS website for comparison purposes. She clarified that schools receive their own data reports to compare with statewide data, and while alternative education students in public school programs are included in the survey, those in non-public programs or homeschooling are not surveyed to protect their privacy.

The [2025 data reports](#) are now available on the website, with infographics to be updated soon.