

CHILDREN'S CABINET PLAN FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Goal: All Maine Children Enter Kindergarten Prepared to Succeed

The Children's Cabinet will implement key strategies to promote the healthy development of all young children in Maine and ensure that all children grow up in healthy, safe and supportive environments. The Cabinet will strive to engage the voice of parents and caregivers in a culturally and linguistically accessible way as we further develop and implement our strategies.

Areas of Focus

The Children's Cabinet will implement strategies that will:

1. Increase access to affordable early care & education, preventive and early intervention services for young children and their families.
2. Raise the quality of our early care and education system and support families to access quality programming.
3. Recruit, prepare and retain a diverse early childhood workforce.

Short term strategies: 2024

- Provide infrastructure grants to existing or new child care programs to create new slots, particularly in underserved areas.
- Continue to offer weekly stipends of \$100 to infant caregivers receiving CCSP to recognize the high cost of providing infant care and increase the quality bump to child care programs on the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) serving infants and toddlers.
- Provide scholarships to help students with low and moderate income attain associates and bachelor's degrees in early childhood education.



- Implement the early childhood mental health consultation statewide to help parents and educators support the social and emotional development of young children, particularly children with special needs.
- Implement a tiered child care salary supplement program to increase wages for early childhood educators and recognize experience.
- Continue strengthening the Perinatal System of Care infrastructure (preconception to 1 year post-partum) including family leadership, parental engagement, and diverse representation.
- Develop and conduct a field test of a valid and reliable Kindergarten Entry Inventory to help educators and policymakers assess children's progress along developmental progressions to inform instruction in the kindergarten year and policymaking.

Long-term strategies: 2024 – 2027

Intermediate strategies: 2024 – 2025

- Provide grants to child care programs to improve quality and rating on the QRIS. (updated)
- Expand professional learning opportunities that support inclusive and trauma informed practices in early care and education settings.
- Offer a professional learning series on early childhood education to school administrators, particularly for those with ECE programs.
- Fund start-up infrastructure grants to expand the number public pre-K slots for 4 year olds.
- Provide grant funding to support new public pre-K partnerships between schools and community partners to overcome barriers to expanding public pre-K in certain communities.
- Align quality programming across state child care assistance programs.
- Implement key models such as First 10 Schools and Communities and First4ME to provide professional development, tools and supports to improve and strengthen coordination and alignment across the birth through early elementary years in communities to ensure smooth transitions into kindergarten for children and families, quality care and education for young children, and greater access to needed resources for families.
- Build a robust Help Me Grow program to provide a comprehensive, statewide, coordinated system of early identification, referral, and follow-up for children from prenatal care up to 8 years and their families.
- Maintain access to high quality perinatal care in Maine by expanding post-partum coverage to 12 months for pregnant people, building linkages between early intervention and medical systems to better serve diverse and underserved populations, and improving the connection to perinatal consultation by expanding the obstetric telehealth network to all birthing hospitals. (new)
- Support perinatal health by assessing the current capacity of the perinatal workforce in Maine, improving perinatal training and education opportunities for students and current providers, and exploring the use of community healthcare workers to support maternal and child health. (new)
- Ensure access to high-quality perinatal care, including behavioral health, for all pregnant women, pregnant people, and infants in Maine at the appropriate Level of Care (LOC) by improving data collection and case reviews to inform quality improvement and policy and encouraging all birth hospitals to participate in the Perinatal Quality Collaborative for Maine and implement perinatal patient safety bundles.
- Increase access to, expand and strengthen early childhood programming at Career and Technical schools.
- Develop clear opportunities and pathways for individuals interested in entering the field of early care and education to support them to access ECE training and education. (new)
- Increase professional development and coaching opportunities for early childhood educators in center-based, family child care programs and the early elementary years in public schools.
- Establish an Early Childhood Integrated Data System to track progress on early childhood goals and to analyze impact of policy decisions.