

September 30, 2016

Dear Governor Bentley and Members of the Alabama Legislature:

As the Chair of the State Children's Policy Council, I am pleased to provide you with this report of the unmet needs of children as reported by the County Children's Policy Councils and the recommendations of the State Children's Policy Council.

The year of 2016 marks the sixteenth year that the County Children's Policy Councils (CPC) from across the State of Alabama have submitted needs assessments to the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) for consideration by the State Children's Policy Council. The role of the State Children's Policy Council is to review the report prepared by DECE "and to make recommendations as it deems necessary and appropriate to the Governor and Legislature by October 1 of each fiscal year." (Section 26-24-34, Code of Alabama)

The needs assessment not only fulfills a legal responsibility of both the County Children's Policy Councils and the State Children's Policy Council, it also serves as an avenue for the counties and state to identify those issues affecting children's lives and ability to grow into productive citizens. Through the work of DECE Children's Policy Council staff, the needs assessment becomes a living document which facilitates communication from local CPCs to the State CPC and vice versa. This sharing of needs, ideas, and resources becomes part of the solution to many of the state's needs. Additionally, local Children's Policy Councils consistently report that a valuable benefit of the Needs assessment is the local communication and planning it fosters.

The county needs assessments were completed by each county prior to July 1, 2016 as required by statute. Once the needs were submitted online to DECE by the local Children's Policy Councils, DECE staff tabulated the results of the top needs. Of the 67 counties in Alabama, 63 county CPCs submitted their local needs assessment to DECE. On August 12, 2016, the State Children's Policy Council met to consider and discuss the needs as identified by local Children's Policy Councils. This report serves as the summary document and report of recommendations as identified by the State CPC members in attendance.

Top Identified Needs by Local Children's Policy Councils in order of frequency:

1. Substance Abuse
2. Parental Involvement
3. Early Learning
4. Transportation
5. Mental Health
6. Child Safety
7. Job Readiness
8. Child Health
9. Truancy
10. School Success

In order to ensure inter-agency conversation, the needs listed above were grouped into clusters for group discussion at the August 12, 2016 State Children's Policy Council meeting held in Montgomery. Transportation impacted each of the identified needs, therefore each group was also asked to consider transportation as it impacted the topics listed. The clusters for discussion groups were as follows:

1. School Success, Truancy and Job Readiness
2. Child Safety and Child Health
3. Early Learning and Parent Involvement
4. Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Each group was asked to consider the following questions:

1. What existing practices or programs need to be continued or expanded to address the most critical needs?
2. What existing practices or programs need to be altered, eliminated or re-examined in light of existing needs?
3. What needs are currently not being addressed and require new policies, practices or programs to be developed?

Below is the summary of the discussions with recommended resources, actions, and best practices:

School Success, Truancy, and Job Readiness

1. What existing practices or programs need to be continued or expanded to address the most critical needs?

School Success

- Advisor-advisee mentoring programs
- Pre-K (Just 4 Developmental Lab, Mobile, AL)
- Schools Alternative Education programs – kids falling through the cracks (lack of wrap around services)
- Middle grade initiatives (grades 5-8) – decision making/personal responsibilities/conflict resolution/soft skills
- Building of community ownership
- Diversion programs to prevent kids from entering Department of Youth Services

Truancy

- Early Warning truancy/specialty court - Mobile Co and Local Education Agency (LEA)

Job Readiness

- Four year plan, career preparedness course, non-traditional diploma
- One diploma
- Workforce development initiative
- Career Technical Education (CTE) simulated workplace programs
- Cooperative education programs
- Jobs for Alabama's graduates (JAG program)
- Partnership with business/industry and LEAs to offer programs at lower ages (5th and 6th grades)

Child Safety/Child Health

1. What existing practices or programs need to be continued or expanded to address the most critical needs?

- Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) –Bullying/Aggressive Behaviors
 - Programs to address Children in Need of Services (CHINS), Department of Human Resources (DHR), DYS
 - Youth distracted driving – Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA), Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), ADPH
 - Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) expansion
 - Health, nutrition and fitness ADPH
 - Safe sleep – ADPH
 - Improve health, nutrition and fitness programs - State Department of Education and ADPH
 - Conduct more outreach for enrollment in AllKids, Medicaid, and Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
2. What existing practices and programs need to be altered, eliminated, or re-examined in light of existing needs?
 - No suggested changes
 3. What needs are currently not being addressed and require new policies, practices, or programs to be developed?
 - Gun control, bullying, gang violence
 - Access to healthcare in rural counties
 - Telemedicine/telehealth needs to be expanded
 - Transportation – state needs a better plan, specifically in rural areas (consider purchasing/fixing up old school buses to utilize for transportation)

Early Learning/Parent Involvement

1. What existing practices or programs need to be continued or expanded to address the most critical needs?
 - Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) – parent education
 - High quality Pre-K
 - Fatherhood Initiatives
 - Parents as teachers
 - Reach Out and Read
 - Early Head Start/Childcare
 - Kids ‘n Kin (30 counties) grandparents and other related care givers
 - Family resource centers
2. What existing practices and programs need to be altered, eliminated, or re-examined in light of existing needs?
 - Licensing for all childcare facilities
 - Local coordination, collaboration among existing programs and services agencies

3. What needs are currently not being addressed and require new policies, practices, or programs to be developed?
 - Colleges of Education Curriculum-recognizing developmental milestones with focus on delays or challenges; mandatory training
 - use of Ages and Stages questionnaire for screening (ASQ3)

Mental Health/Substance Abuse

1. What existing practices or programs need to be continued or expanded to address the most critical needs?
 - Transportation – Reach out to rural transportation sources, resources/local community partners (churches, civic groups)
 - Expand family drug courts
 - Underage drinking and drug intervention programs
 - Drug treatment programs (facilities for juveniles)
 - Additional mental health “find teams”
 - Local CPCs develop programs like “Drugs Erase Dreams”
2. What existing practices and programs need to be altered, eliminated, or re-examined in light of existing needs?
 - Legislation for juvenile and family drug courts and to expand existing pilot drug courts
 - Affordability of intervention programs
3. What needs are currently not being addressed and require new policies, practices, or programs to be developed?
 - Develop co-occurring (Mental Illness & Substance Abuse) treatment programs
 - Develop and expand quality respite services at the local level with community partners

Overall Feedback

In addition to considering resources specific to the topics, the School Success, Truancy, and Job Readiness discussion group also suggested a systematic approach to CPC needs and resource identification which involves asking and answering the following questions.

- What are the desired outcomes of each goal?
- How would we measure success?
- What are our benchmarks? Without identified benchmarks which are mutually agreed upon, it will be difficult to determine if expansion/eliminating programs is necessary
- Identify methods to keep State CPC apprised of current programs designed to meet identified needs.

My hope is that each of you will carefully consider these recommendations and needs as funding decisions about the well-being of Alabama’s children are considered.

Sincerely,

Jeana Ross
Chair, Alabama Children's Policy Council