



September 29, 2017

The Honorable Kay Ivey
Governor of Alabama
State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Governor Ivey:

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 and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama. (See § 26-24-30(c), Ala. Code 1975).

The year of 2017 marks the seventeenth year that the County Children's Policy Councils 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." (§ 26-24-30(c), Ala. Code 1975)

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 counties and the state to identify the issues that are 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 Children Policy Councils to the State Children's Policy Council and vice versa. This sharing of needs, ideas, and resources becomes part of the solution to many of the state's needs. Additionally, the local Children's Policy Councils consistently report that a valuable benefit of the needs assessment is the local communication and planning it fosters. In addition, the Children Policy Council members can use the information to educate, advocate, make changes in policy, create new local programs, promote collaboration among local agencies and businesses, and justify their need for funding.

The county needs assessments were completed by each county prior to July 1, 2017 as required by statute. Once the local Children's Policy Councils submitted the needs assessments online to DECE, DECE staff tabulated the results of the top needs. Of the 67 counties in Alabama, 60 county Children Policy Councils submitted their local needs assessment to DECE.

On Friday, July 28, 2017, the State Children's Policy Council met to consider and discuss the needs as identified by the local Children's Policy Councils. The top three needs identified across the state of Alabama are:

Substance Abuse: Substance abuse was self-reported by the local Children Policy Councils as the #1 underlying factor to many problems across the state. Substance use affects crime rates, increases child abuse, domestic violence, and negatively impacts school readiness and early learning.

Parental Involvement and Family Engagement: Local Children Policy Councils expressed that access to family counseling and to tailored family resources is needed to positively impact parental involvement and family engagement.

Mental Health: Mental health needs were self-reported across the state with the emphasis being placed on increasing access to counselors, increasing access to mental health professionals with specialized training, creating more acute inpatient services, and providing knowledge surrounding the availability of beds for adults and children.

This report serves as the summary document as identified by the State Children Policy Councils' members in attendance. In addition, based on the County Children's Policy Councils' needs assessments and the top three needs indicated from across the state, please find below the recommendations provided by the State Children Policy Council members and Lyn Stuart, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, pursuant to § 26-24-30(c), Ala. Code 1975:

**Alabama State Children's Policy Council Recommendations
2017-18**

Recommendation 1: Build awareness among policy makers that the needs of Substance Abuse, Mental Health, and Parental Engagement and Family Involvement are interrelated and have severe negative impacts on the State's social and economic capacity.

Recommendation 2: Convene agencies currently working to address the interrelated needs of Substance Abuse, Mental Health, and Parental Engagement and Family Involvement to determine opportunities for collaborative efforts and to share best practices.

Recommendation 3: Explore opportunities for funding cross-agency, multi-sector efforts. Funding opportunities should include national and regional sources of potential funding. Submit applications for such funding on behalf of the State.

Recommendation 4: Identify opportunities for public awareness of resources and agencies, which can serve citizens, school districts, and local CPC's, in relation to the interrelated needs at the local, regional and State levels. Ensure communication among entities at the different levels of government. Ensure that the public is engaged and aware of such efforts and providers.

Sincerely,



Jeana Ross

Secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education