



September 20, 2018

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 2018 marks the eighteenth 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 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, 2018 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, all 67 county Children Policy Councils submitted their local needs assessment to DECE.



On Friday, July 27, 2018, 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, and creating more acute inpatient services.

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 2018-19

Substance Abuse:

Recommendation 1 | Enhance and expand family court capacity to effectively collaborate to address the needs of infants, young children, and their families affected by substance use disorders and prenatal substance exposure.

Recommendation 2 | Sustain the effective collaborative partnerships, processes, programs, and procedures implemented to achieve the goals of the established Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council.

Recommendation 3 | Convene agencies currently working to address Substance Abuse to provide from the field lessons on their meeting the needs of children and families affected by substance use disorders.



Parental Involvement and Family Engagement:

Recommendation 1 | Identify opportunities for public awareness of family engagement related resources, which can serve citizens, school districts, and local CPC's, in relation to the interrelated needs at the local, regional and State levels.

Recommendation 2 | Ensure communication of the importance of family engagement among entities at the different levels of government by building 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 3 | Ensure that the public is engaged and aware of such efforts and providers.

Recommendation 4 | Convene agencies currently working to address the interrelated needs of Parental Engagement and Family Involvement to determine opportunities for collaborative efforts and to share best practices.

Mental Health

Recommendation 1 | Determine opportunities for collaborative efforts to build awareness of statewide resources (i.e., available research-based screenings) that can assist parents of young children and adolescents experiencing a mental health crisis.

Recommendation 2 | Ensure best practices are shared and support provided to the work of the education, mental health and juvenile court community to fortify a mental health promotion continuum from infant and early childhood mental health (prenatal to age 8) to individualized school based mental health services (beyond age 8 into adolescence) across the state.

Recommendation 3 | Explore opportunities for funding cross-agency, multi-sector efforts to increase access to mental health beds. Funding opportunities should include national and regional sources of potential funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeana Ross", written over a horizontal line.

Jeana Ross

Secretary, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education