



# The Early Childhood Governance Report

By Management Analysis and Development (MAD) at Minnesota  
Management and Budget

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# Agenda

- Background
- Key Takeaways
- Consolidation Findings
- Coordination Findings
- Options, Considerations, Next Steps

# Background

# Previous approaches in Minnesota

- Legislation passed in 1995 to replace the Department of Education with the more broadly-focused Department of Children, Youth, and Families
  - Programs distributed back to MDE, MDH, and DHS by Governor Pawlenty in 2003
- Minnesota's Early Childhood Advisory Council task force recommends freestanding, cabinet level office of early learning
  - Stemmed from 2010 legislative report
  - Colocation of early childhood programs in one agency was not addressed
- 2011 Office of Early Learning at MDE
  - Scope and priority functions developed by Office of Early Learning Task Force
  - Funded by Race to the Top

# Early Childhood Governance Report Background

- A bill was introduced last session to create a Department of Early Childhood consolidating select programs currently within MDE, DHS, and MDH into a new cabinet-level agency.
- \$200,000 in funding was directed to the Children's Cabinet to produce a report on the governance of programs relating to early childhood development, care, and learning.
- Statute directed the Children's Cabinet to develop recommendations to the legislature and Governor's office by February 1.
- Children's Cabinet consulted with MMB's Management Analysis Division to complete the report.

# MAD research and information gathering

- Review of 35+ studies and reports regarding early childhood governance, Minnesota's early childhood systems, and governance in other states
- Discussions and interviews with 100+ community stakeholders and early childhood advocates
- Interviews and webinars with five national experts on early childhood governance and officials in nine states with relevant experience
- Conversations with 18 leaders and other officials in Minnesota's Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, and the Children's Cabinet

# Notable “whos” for engagement, state interviews

## Community stakeholder group discussions

- Children’s Defense Fund Early Childhood Advocates
- Community Solutions Grants Advisory Council
- Kids Count on Us
- Local education leaders
- Local Public Health Association
- MN Assoc of County Social Service Administrators
- MN Children’s Cabinet Advisory Councils
- MN Tribal Resources for Early Childhood Care
- Subcommittee of advisors for MN’s Preschool Development Grant

## Interviews with other states

- California
- Colorado
- District of Columbia
- Georgia
- Missouri
- Oregon
- Washington

# Key Takeaways



# Themes From MAD Research

- Governance is important.
- Consolidation offers opportunities for improved alignment—but doesn't guarantee it.
- There are limits to what governance can accomplish.
- The impacts of governance on outcomes is unclear based on research done to date.
- Changing governance involves costs, but so does sticking with the status quo.
- Stakeholders both supported and opposed consolidation of governance.
- Scope for consolidation differs state to state and changes over time.
- Shifting MN governance now may impede recent progress on coordination, alignment.

***“Whatever it is, you should be very clear why you are changing governance. Have a clear sense of what it is you’re trying to accomplish and then design the change to accomplish that.”***

-Elliot Regenstein, expert on state-level early childhood policy and advocacy

# Consolidation Findings

# Impact of Consolidation in 5 Areas

## Impacts on state government operations

- Coordination and alignment of early childhood programs within state government
- Articulation between early care and education programs and the kindergarten through grade 12 system

## Impacts on children, families, and providers

- Kindergarten readiness of all children, regardless of race, income, and zip code
- Effort required of families to receive services they are entitled to
- Effort required of service providers to participate in childhood programs

# Potential pros to consolidation



## Government operations

- Improves coordination, alignment
- Agencies can focus on other priorities
- Possible cost savings with reduced duplication
- Improves quality, consistency
- Improves data sharing
- Opportunities for public-private partnerships



## Children and families

- Designs around children and families (human-centered)
- Addresses child care access issues
- Recognizes trauma
- Provides one-stop shop for services



## Early childhood policy and programs

- New or elevated focus on early childhood, unified authority/accountability
- Averts system failure
- Designs system around equity, address racial, ethnic, income, and geographic inequities
- Reconsiders value of child care workers
- Increases funding/resources, reduce competition
- Creates positive culture around programs
- Sustains support across political shifts

# Potential cons to consolidation



## Government operations

- Complex reorganization difficult to implement, especially during pandemic
- Disruptive shifts in current public-private relationships
- Intensifies competition for funding/resources
- Various upfront costs involved with program transfer
- Not guaranteed to succeed



## Children and families

- May complicate service delivery if the state decides poorly on agency scope
- Worsens fragmentation in service delivery.



## Early childhood policy and programs

- Distracts attention and funding from efforts to improve alignment and effectiveness.
- Alters coordination paths, creates fragmentation, disrupts current progress
- Reduces early childhood standing and influence
- Undermines whole-family approach
- Doesn't directly address challenges
- Emphasis on cost reduction rather than improved/expanded services

# Key points from officials in states that have consolidated

- There is not one correct governance model.
- The governance structure will change over time.
- Dedicate time and resources to planning and stakeholder engagement.
- Increased efficiency/decreased costs are unlikely.
- Local-level coordination is crucial to success.
- Communicate early and often. Offer multiple modes for input.
- Leadership and political choices shape the outcome.
- Coordination is still needed.
- Unclear if a consolidated agency can attract more funding.

# Coordination Findings



# Potential pros to coordination

*Items in italics are benefits when there is a formal office charged with coordination.*



## **Government operations**

- Commitment to coordination reduces fragmentation
- Avoids additional costs
- Maintains current structures
- State structure matches federal funding streams
- *Increases accountability*
- *Can be housed in existing state agency*



## **Children and families**

- Single point of contact for services
- Increases visibility for early childhood challenges



## **Early childhood policy and programs**

- Ties agencies to policy focus
- *Provides identifiable office for early childhood*
- *Boosts awareness of important policy area*
- *Creates single point of contact*

# Potential cons to coordination

*Items in italics are risks when there is a formal office charged with coordination.*



## **Government operations**

- Coordination as a lower priority
- Structure is vulnerable to changes in political focus
- No clear accountability
- Trouble tracking budgets, funding
- Needs dedicated staff authority
- *Will require funding, staffing, other resources*



## **Early childhood policy and programs**

- Low visibility
- Diverse priorities and goals
- Slow, difficult decision making
- Siloed programming and funding
- *May have coordinating responsibility but lack authority to enforce*
- *Creates another layer of governance*

# Options, Considerations, Next Steps

***“Thus, a state that desires to reexamine its early childhood governance structure should not necessarily begin with a particular model in mind but rather focus on its early childhood goals and the functions to be served by governance,”***

-Elliot Regenstein and Katherine Lipper, experts on state-level early childhood policy and advocacy

# Options for Early Childhood Governance

1. Continue coordination with increased resources and authority.
2. Expand Children's Cabinet's role in cross-agency coordination and alignment.
3. Identify key priorities, then identify governance changes.
4. Create an office to coordinate across state agencies.
5. Consolidate and elevate policies and programs within agencies.
6. Consolidate programs and policy, define the scope, engage stakeholders, develop a plan.
7. Consolidation and address challenges as they arise.

# What Minnesota needs for successful consolidation

## What needs to happen or be true?

- Start with key challenges for early childhood efforts —governance or not.
- Plan for governance change, using dedicated staff, resources, time (years?).
- Engage with leaders and secure buy-in.
- Figure out the nuts and bolts of business systems.
- Factor in and sort out the implications of a governance change for local service providers and state-local roles.
- Determine the funding and resources needed to advance the state's early childhood efforts.

# More on what Minnesota needs for successful consolidation

- Engage the wide range of those involved in early childhood.
- Identify the appropriate scope for age range and programming.
- Involve the state agencies.
- Take time and weigh timing.
- Build on what's been done.
- Designate a convener within state government.
- Coordinate communication. Be clear and consistent.
- Manage the organizational change.
- Hire an excellent manager at the top.
- Determine authority for restructuring.

- Identify key priorities to advance early childhood outcomes.
- Consider the options MAD presented.
- Determine the governance approach that best supports those priorities.
- Secure resources to determine authorities, specific changes, and expert management necessary.
- Plan, engage, and build on what's been done.



# Thank you!

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