

APRIL 2026

Transforming State Early Childhood Governance

A Case Study



Executive Summary

Strategies for governing and administering early childhood programs and services at the state level affect parents' awareness of, access to, and experience with vital services for their families. No consensus exists on the optimal governance structures for early childhood, which underscores the need for additional research on best practices for state-level early childhood governance.

To understand the full range of state early childhood governance strategies, the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University (Policy Impact Center) conducted a national landscape scan to identify each state's strategy for organizing the administration of early childhood programs and services. The Policy Impact Center then selected states with various governance styles for in-depth case studies. This brief presents the case study results for Kansas.

In 2025, Kansas enacted legislation to consolidate most of its early education services under one new department, the Office of Early Childhood.

Although still in the process of transitioning, Kansas's consolidation of early childhood programs and services offers the following key lessons learned:

- Early childhood leaders spent years fostering relationships and building trust to effectively collaborate before pursuing consolidation.
- The fragmented nature of early childhood programs and services was widely recognized as a challenge.
- The Governor's commitment to children facilitated governance change.
- Strategic compromises were made to make consolidation politically feasible.
- Leaders framed consolidation as a stepping stone to create a robust early childhood system.

Introduction

Across the US, state approaches to organizing the administration of programs and services for young children and their families vary widely. Some states consolidate governance of early childhood programs into relatively few agencies and departments. Other states disperse early childhood programs across numerous state government entities. States also make different choices on which services to group together within an office or division, and the types of departments where a given service lives.

Research to date, however, does not identify the optimal governance structure for early childhood programs to maximize effectiveness or efficiency of service provision. Existing resources also do not comprehensively document how state governance choices are similar to or different from one another.

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center at Vanderbilt University (Policy Impact Center) conducted a study of early childhood governance in the US beginning in the spring of 2024. The study includes a [comprehensive national landscape scan](#) of early childhood governance and case studies of selected states with different early childhood governance strategies. Through the study, we identify patterns in early childhood governance; examine the benefits and challenges of different governance strategies; and identify best practices and lessons learned from states to inform effective and efficient early childhood governance.

This brief provides the case study findings for Kansas. For the case study, we interviewed 10 early childhood leaders in Kansas representing state government, non-profits, providers, researchers, and advocates. Our findings summarize what we learned through these interviews.

Early Childhood Governance in Kansas

Governance Structure

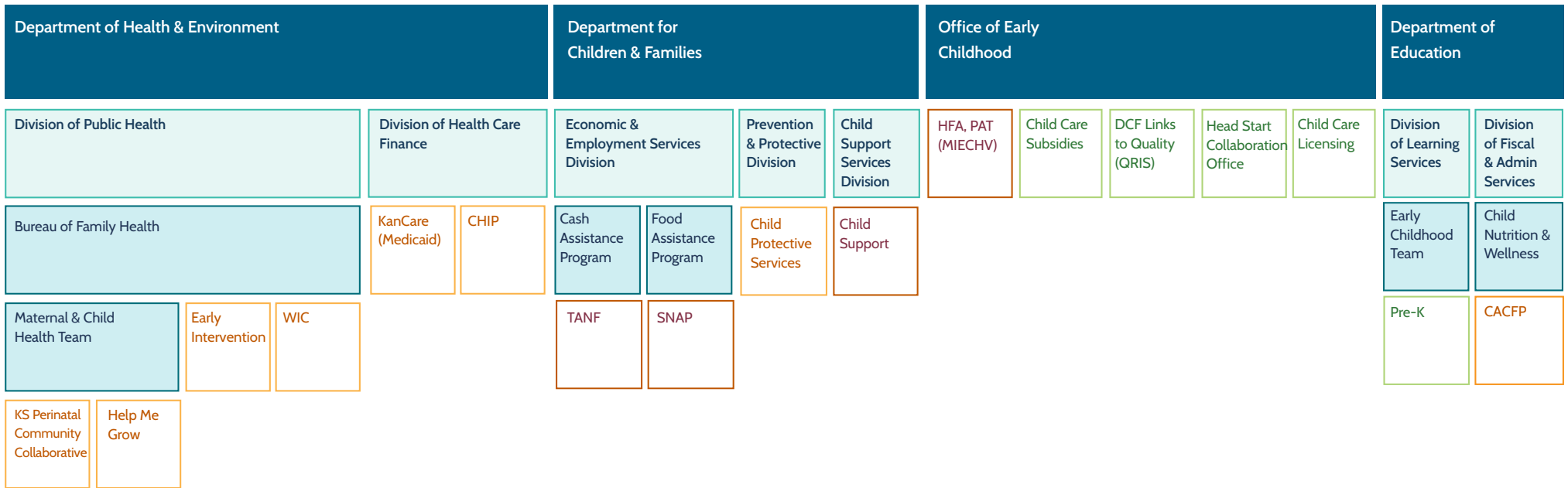
For our study, we considered all education, health, and economic programs administered by the state that benefit families with children prenatal to age 3. In Kansas, we found early childhood programs are housed across four departments (see Figure 1). Figure 1 represents the results of the consolidation of early childhood programs in 2026 (more information on consolidation below).

Each of the departments administering programs and services for young children and families in Kansas provides distinct support. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment provides multiple early childhood health programs, including healthcare coverage (Medicaid

and CHIP), prenatal services, WIC, Early Intervention services, and a screening and connection service (Help Me Grow). The Department for Children and Families administers economic and family support services such as TANF, SNAP, child protective services, and child support.

Finally, the Office of Early Childhood and the Kansas State Department of Education have a range of educational programming for families with young children. The Office of Early Childhood administers child care subsidies, child care licensing, child care quality ratings (Links to Quality), home visiting, and the Head Start State Collaboration Office. The Department of Education administers pre-Kindergarten and federal meal programming (CACFP).

Figure 1. Kansas Governance Chart



History of Kansas's Early Childhood Governance Structure

Kansas Established Dedicated Funding for Child Welfare and Early Childhood

Kansas has a long history of valuing early childhood. As early as 1980, Kansas became the first state to establish a dedicated fund, the Kansas Family and Children Trust Fund, for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.¹

Kansas' commitment to early childhood was demonstrated again with the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement of 1998, in response to which the Kansas legislature created the Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund and the Children's Initiatives Fund (CIF). Settlement dollars are deposited into the KEY Fund then transferred to the CIF to fund programs with a focus on early childhood, health, and child welfare.^{2,3}

The Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund (Children's Cabinet)¹ is responsible for the review, assessment, and evaluation of programs using CIF dollars; it also played a critical role in building awareness of the importance of early childhood throughout the early 2000s. Today, CIF-funded programs include, but are not limited to, child care assistance, home visiting, family preservation services, Early Intervention services, and the public preschool program.² The fiscal agency for the Children's Cabinet was originally the Department of Children and Families, but in 2016 moved to the Department of Education.¹

¹ The Kansas Family and Children's Trust Fund became the responsibility of the Children's Cabinet when it was created in 1999.



Kansas was the first state to dedicate its settlement dollars to early childhood. Yet, KEY Funds have not served as the endowment fund it was envisioned to be, both because tobacco sales have decreased and because KEY Funds and CIF were transferred to cover shortfalls in the State General Fund throughout the 2000s and 2010s.⁴

Kansas Leaders Centered Collaboration in Systems Building

In addition to dedicated funding, Kansas leaders also centered collaboration from the start. In 2003, Kansas was awarded the federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) planning grant. Although the funding was minimal, state leaders at the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research used the opportunity to build trust and relationships across the field. The resulting plan, the Kansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (KECCS) Plan, outlined five goal areas: early care and education; health care and medical home; family support; parent education; and mental health.⁵ Colloquially known as the “people’s plan,” the KECCS provided a comprehensive definition of early childhood that remains foundational today.

Additionally, during the Sebelius administration (2003-2009), state leaders visited North Carolina to learn more about the Smart Start program, a county-based early childhood system promoting kindergarten readiness among young children. The local approach and intentional collaboration embedded in the Smart Start model was reflected in Kansas’s approach to the Request for Proposals process to allocate CIF.

Building on previous collaborative work, in 2014 the Children’s Cabinet developed the Blueprint for Early Childhood to integrate various efforts to create a comprehensive early childhood system. Leaders identified three building blocks for early childhood: healthy development, strong families, and early learning. The Blueprint serves as a decision-making guide to support the creation of a strong early childhood ecosystem in all communities.⁶

Finally, interviewees pointed to December 2018 as the tipping point for comprehensive system planning, when Kansas was awarded the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG). While leaders across the state had been consistently working to build a holistic early childhood system, PDG funding was critical in pushing the work forward. (Pandemic relief funds subsequently bolstered funding for early childhood as well.)

The Kansas Department of Education was the lead agency for the PDG planning grant,ⁱⁱ and along with leadership from the Department of Health and Environment, Department of Children and Families, and the Children’s Cabinet formed a State Directors Team to guide the work. Additionally, the Needs Assessment Team, led by the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research, spearheaded data collection and analysis. Using a variety of engagement strategies, the needs assessment ultimately was shaped by the input of over 6,100 Kansans (duplicate count).⁷

ⁱⁱ The Children’s Cabinet was the lead agency for subsequent PDG renewal grants.

Systems Building Work Revealed Fragmentation of Early Childhood Governance

The 2019 needs assessment illustrated why the system was not working, emphasizing that “families’ experiences are profoundly shared by where they live across the state” and “too many young Kansas children grow up in families where basic needs are not met.” Concerning governance, the needs assessment found that the current system was “siloeed, fragmented, and difficult to navigate.”⁷

In response to the needs voiced by the community, leaders began to develop the All in for Kansas Kids Strategic Plan. The five-year plan outlined seven goals: state-level coordination; community-level coordination; family knowledge and choice; private sector collaboration; capacity and access; workforce; and quality and environments.⁵ This plan was supported by the Kelly administration and remains a touchstone for early childhood leaders today.

Concurrently with the PDG-funded work, Kansas leaders were also increasingly provided with opportunities to critically consider the benefits and challenges of their own early childhood governance structure. These included continuing conversations with leaders in other states such as North Carolina and New Mexico, a 2018 Bipartisan Policy Center report on governance,⁸ and convenings such as the Hunt Institute Early Childhood Leadership Summit and National Governors Association meetings.

Although leaders recognized the benefits of their current structure, namely the trust and relationships that allowed for meaningful collaboration, certain challenges remained. The pandemic had shown the fragility of the early childhood system, and the needs assessment further emphasized how complex and confusing the system was for families to navigate. Early childhood advocates also experienced the fragmentation of the system, often repeating the same legislative testimony for each of the individual agencies serving young children and families.

For those in state government, it was difficult at times to prioritize collaboration amongst all the demands of any given role. Although the Children’s Cabinet was in many ways responsible for the early childhood system, it lacked the authority to make final decisions; while the Governor’s Office did have that authority, its limited capacity slowed decision-making.

Finally, legislators understood the importance of early childhood but wanted greater efficiency and accountability for the early childhood system; it was difficult to tell if investments were moving the needle. The business community also stressed the need for child care, calling for improvements that could match the needs of the growing workforce. In this way, child care drove the conversation for consolidation despite earlier work to holistically conceptualize early childhood.

Governor Kelly Championed Governance Change

Ultimately, Governor Kelly championed the issue of early childhood governance. Governor Kelly had a long history of working with children and families, and although the pandemic stalled her plans during her first term, early childhood remained an important pillar going into her second term.

As such, Governor Kelly's first act in her second term was Executive Order 23-01, which established an Early Childhood Transition Task Force. Facilitated by the Hunt Institute with support from the University of Kansas Center for Public Partnerships and Research, the Task Force was charged with assessing the current governance structure and providing recommendations for a unified structure.⁹

Members of the task force represented business leaders, philanthropic organizations, advocates, early childhood service providers, and bipartisan legislators. Additionally, a Community Engagement Tour was organized to engage community stakeholders at nine locations across the state, with a total of approximately 500 participants. Similar to the needs assessment conducted in 2019, the listening tour found issues of access and affordability, workforce, and fractured and stressed early childhood systems.⁹

The Task Force's final report provided detailed recommendations for consolidation, including consolidation logistics and a timeline, details on programmatic movements, and data metrics by which to measure success. Notably, despite years of work to establish a holistic conception to early childhood, the report recommendations focused on the consolidation of early childhood education programs; early childhood health programs were imagined as collaborative partners to the new consolidated office.⁹ This report, published in December 2023, was then shared by the Governor's Office with the legislature to better understand what was politically viable.

Based on the legislators' feedback, during the 2024 session H.B. 2785 was introduced to consolidate some early childhood programs into a new, standalone office.¹⁰ Although the Governor's Office negotiated a compromise with House members (which loosened child care licensing thresholds), it was not taken up by the Senate.

The Office of Early Childhood was Established in Legislation in 2025

During the 2025 session, H.B. 2045 was introduced, again proposing consolidation.¹¹ The Governor's Office worked closely with the legislature, compromising to ensure the bill's passage. Specifically, amendments to the bill included changes to the composition of the Children's Cabinet, as well as loosening child care licensing thresholds and vaccine requirements; these concessions caused some of the early childhood community to withdraw their support for the bill.¹² Nonetheless, the bill was ultimately signed into law by Governor Kelly in April 24, 2025.

As passed, the bill structured the new Office of Early Childhood (the Office) into 3 branches: child care, home visiting, and the Children's Cabinet. Concerning child care, child care subsidies, Links to Quality (QRIS), and the Head Start Collaboration Office were previously in the Department of Children and Families and child care licensing was previously in the Department of Health and Environment. Concerning home visiting, various programs were previously housed in the Department of Health and Environment, the Department of Education, and the Department of Children and Families (see Figure 2).

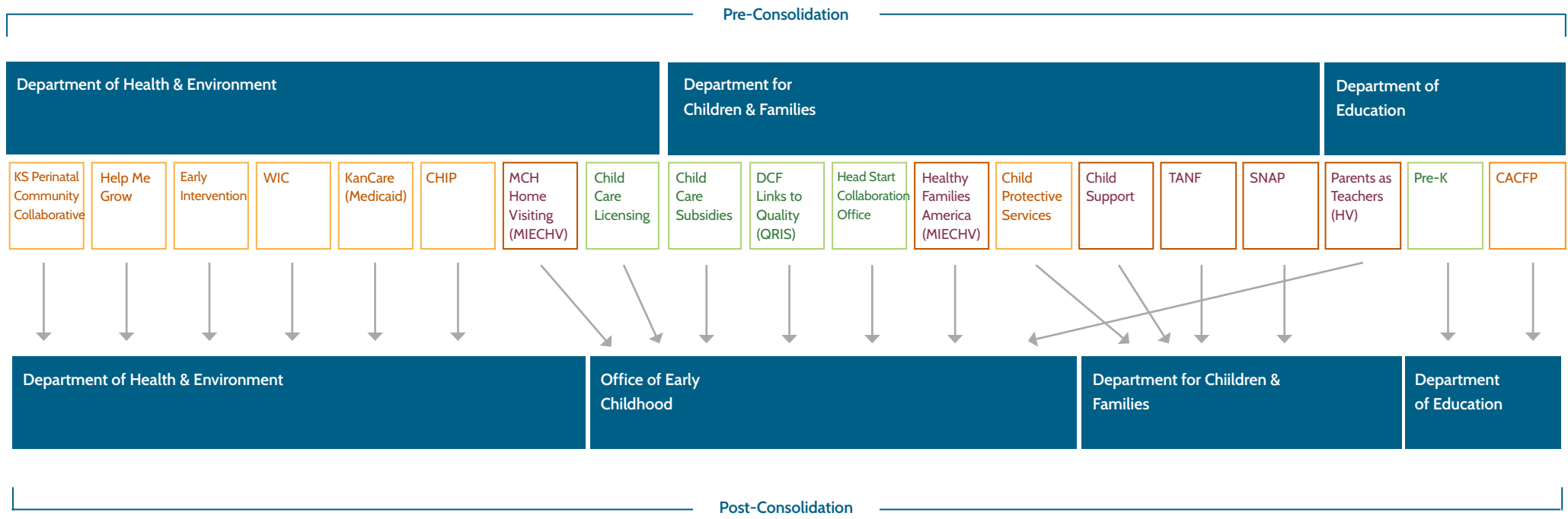
Additionally, the fiscal agency for the Children's Cabinet was now the Office of Early Childhood. Although the Children's Cabinet historically acted as the de facto lead setting the early childhood agenda, they will remain integral as the grantmaking arm of the new Office. As mentioned previously, the composition of the Children's Cabinet was also revised in the bill, with the Director of Early Childhood added as a non-voting member and two additional legislative appointees; this brings the total voting membership to 11, with five appointed by the Governor and six appointed by the legislature.¹²

Some programs, such as child welfare, pre-K, and Early Intervention, were never seriously considered as part of the consolidation. Although pre-K in particular is commonly consolidated, it was not included in Kansas's consolidation for a number of reasons: pre-K is part of the school financing formula;ⁱⁱⁱ leaders felt it should remain housed with the special education services (IDEA Part B); and the Department of Education is under the authority of the Board of Education rather than the Governor's Office.

The new Office of Early Childhood must be operational by July 1, 2026, providing leaders with a transition period of approximately 1 year. Governor Kelly appointed Zach Vincent as the Transition Director for the Office of Early Childhood to manage the transition logistics, including stakeholder engagement, legislative updates, and the transfer of staff, funding, and programs.

ⁱⁱⁱ The school financing formula has included at-risk 4 year olds at ½ of the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) since 1999 and at-risk 3 year olds since 2018. Pre-K is also funded in part through the CIF.

Figure 2. Programmatic Shifts during Governance Consolidation



Transition logistics are critical, as this detailed planning will ensure state employees, families, and providers experience a seamless transition to the new Office from the first day. For example, Kansas families receive child care subsidies through the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card system, which also provides TANF and SNAP benefits; ensuring federal funding for subsidies, which will go to the Office, is transferred to DCF, which administers the EBT cards, is critical to creating a smooth transition for families in need. Concerning state employees, although there was initial resistance from some staff, leadership is trying to ensure all are well-informed and feel heard through regular communication and strong feedback loops.

Additionally, the Governor's Office convened a Transition Advisory Group beginning in December 2025 to provide input on the implementation and early priorities of the new Office. Members of the Advisory Group include parents, providers, advocates, and other stakeholders, providing a diversity of viewpoints. Despite this, members agree the Office should work to make child care more accessible.

Christi Smith was appointed as the inaugural Director of the Office of Early Childhood, and she has already begun to lead by example, fostering a culture of creativity and innovation in the Office. Since each agency sets its own policies in Kansas, internal committees are being formed to define the culture of the Office.

The Office published its first annual report in January 2026, outlining the transition process and the recommended priorities for the Office's first year in operation. The report also provides a template for future metrics against which the Office's success can be measured;¹³ these metrics were crafted in response to the voiced needs of providers. Kansas leaders are currently partnering with Watershed Advisors to build baseline metrics, although the data has proven challenging to untangle.

As of this publication, the transition is still ongoing. Overall, interviewees felt hopeful for the opportunities the new Office would bring; a particularly bright spot was the consolidation of various home visiting programs. Although the Office was not seen as a silver bullet, interviewees did feel the Office would foster more coordination, strategic funding decisions, and family access. Finally, it is important to note that Governor Kelly is term-limited, and the vision and goals of the Office may change under future administrations.

Lessons Learned

Early childhood leaders spent years fostering relationships and building trust to effectively collaborate before pursuing consolidation.

As noted above, Kansas leaders began intentionally collaborating to define their early childhood system in the early 2000s. From the beginning, Kansas leaders thought of early childhood holistically, considering health, education, and family support programs as part of a single ecosystem. This was reflected during collaborative efforts, with participants' diverse expertise resulting in comprehensive early childhood system plans; these included the Kansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Plan in 2004, the Blueprint for Early Childhood in 2014, and All in For Kansas Kids in 2019.

Interviewees repeatedly noted the collaboration as a strength of their previous governance structure, with some expressing that it was a necessary step to achieve consolidation. Particularly, the ongoing collaboration allowed leaders across the field to come together, building trusting relationships over time.

For some leaders, the previous governance structure fostered natural collaboration; for example, various early health program staff were all housed on the same office floor. For others, more intentional collaboration was required, but nonetheless leaders valued collaborative opportunities.

Concerning the new governance structure, interviewees recognized the Office may improve collaboration for some, but not all, programs. Specifically, while previous efforts adopted a holistic approach to early childhood, the Office is primarily focused on early childhood education. Interviewees expressed a desire for continued collaboration, although how these partnerships would be realized under the new structure was still unknown.

The fragmented nature of early childhood programs and services was widely recognized as a challenge.

Interviewees agreed that the previous structure was fragmented, making it difficult for families to access needed programs and services. Although a new Office was not seen as the only solution, there were a variety of reasons stakeholders felt consolidation may effectively address the issue.

Specifically, interviewees pointed to the value of having a single office leading the charge for early childhood. With someone focused solely on early childhood, the system could have greater accountability. Additionally, interviewees felt building legislators' confidence in the system (i.e., that funding was used effectively) may support greater investments in the future.

Other interviewees saw the new Office as an opportunity to improve contracting and legislative testimony that was previously duplicated for each distinct agency administering programs for young children and families. Interviewees also felt a consolidated Office could allow for more proactive and responsive decision-making.

Ultimately, although there were a variety of reasons leaders felt the Office was valuable, it was clear in interviews that there was a strong consensus that as it was, the early childhood system was challenging for families to navigate.

The Governor's commitment to children facilitated governance change.

Governor Kelly has a long history of centering children and families, particularly with her work on children's mental health and with the Kansas Recreation and Parks Association, which provided drop-in, after school, and summer child care among other services. From these experiences, she understood how pivotal supports during early childhood can be for children's outcomes.

Her commitment to early childhood was apparent as an elected official, peaking when she set the north star for her second gubernatorial term "to make Kansas the best place in the country to raise a family."¹⁴ As noted above, the first act of her second term was to convene a Early Childhood Transition Task Force to assess the current governance structure and make recommendations for a unified structure. Additionally, the Governor's Office led the negotiations for the consolidation bills in both 2024 and 2025. As such, interviewees uniformly identified Governor Kelly's central role in pushing forward governance change.

Strategic compromises were made to make consolidation politically feasible.

At the time of passage, Kansas had a Republican supermajority in the legislature and a Democratic governor, making compromise essential for progress in the state. The Governor's Office was proactive in engaging the legislature even before the first bill was introduced. As mentioned above, the final report of the Early Childhood Transition Task Force was shared with the legislature, allowing the Governor's Office to understand what proposed changes would be politically tenable.

The effort to create bipartisan support continued throughout the introduction of both bills. Critical to this effort were strategic messaging campaigns that spoke to the concerns of the Republican supermajority. Many Republican legislators were concerned with the efficiency of a new Office; this was especially amplified because of the Department of Government Efficiency cuts happening concurrently at the federal level. Language implying a "growing" government was avoided, and the proposed entity was renamed from the "Department of Early Childhood" to the "Office of Early Childhood." Even so, the first bill was unsuccessful; the second attempt in 2025 passed with further compromises. As mentioned above, the final legislation changed the composition of the Children's Cabinet; with additional political appointees, the tenure of the board may be more contentious.

Child care licensing thresholds and vaccine requirements^{iv} were also loosened as part of the compromise; concerning licensing, unlicensed providers are now allowed to provide up to 35 hours of care for up to four children per week (a significant increase from 20 hours of care for up to two children per week). Although those advocating for fewer licensing regulations felt this compromise would increase child care supply, thus far it seems to have primarily shifted existing providers from providing licensed to unlicensed care.

As noted above, some of the early childhood community withdrew their support for the bill because of these compromises. Although all interviewees were hopeful about the opportunities a new Office provides, some questioned whether it was worth the tradeoff and some felt their concerns were ignored.

After the bill's passage, the Governor's Office chose a Transition Director that was distinct from the inaugural Director of the Office, perhaps to ensure any hard feelings caused by the change would not fester. As the Office becomes operational, leaders will continue to report to legislators to demonstrate how the Office is fulfilling its mandates.

^{iv} Parents could already decline immunization for their children using medical or religious beliefs, but the bill expanded the definition of religious beliefs to include religious or non-theistic moral and ethical beliefs.

Leaders framed consolidation as a stepping stone to create a robust early childhood system.

Although not a “fix-all,” interviewees largely felt the Office was an important step to build a strong, holistic early childhood system in Kansas. As such, interviewees framed the new Office of Early Childhood as an important milestone, with other key moments being the KEY fund from the tobacco settlement and the PDG-funded work.

Although early childhood governance is still in the process of transitioning in Kansas, interviewees repeatedly expressed the Office’s future potential. Specifically, many interviewees felt the governance change created new opportunities to improve family access, facilitate collaboration (both within and across state agencies), build or strengthen public-private partnerships, and maximize or grow funding.

Additionally, given the holistic approach to early childhood Kansas leaders have historically taken, some interviewees expressed that despite not housing all early childhood programs, the new Office could become a strong advocate for the entire early childhood system. The new Office could set a vision for the system, acting as a convener while still allowing communities to drive the work.

Conclusion

States approach early childhood governance in a variety of ways, and these choices can impact parents' awareness of, access to, and experience with early childhood programs and services. Yet research to date provides little guidance on best practices of early childhood governance.

This work begins to address the gap in knowledge about optimal early childhood governance by considering the benefits and challenges of the new consolidated governance structure in Kansas. Interviews with key leaders highlighted the years of collaboration that continually strengthened the early childhood system and created a shared understanding of the challenges families faced. Additionally, the critical leadership of Governor Kelly drove governance change, with her staff leading negotiations to ensure the new Office's passage.

Overall, interviewees are hopeful for the new Office, seeing it as an important next step in building out a strong early childhood ecosystem. As Kansas is still in the process of transitioning, time will tell if the Office allows Kansas leaders to maximize funding, foster collaboration, and, most importantly, improve families' access and experiences.

Although each state has a unique context, these best practices and lessons learned in Kansas can benefit leaders in other states working to craft more effective and efficient early childhood governance systems.



References

1. *Mission & History*. (n.d.). Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. Retrieved March 9, 2026, from <https://kschildrenscabinet.gov/mission-history/>
2. *Kansas Children's Cabinet 2024 Annual Report*. (2024). Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. https://kschildrenscabinet.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Annual_Report_2024.pdf
3. *Kansas Endowment for Youth (KEY) Fund Summary FY 2021–FY 2024*. (2023). https://kslegislature.gov/li_2024/b2023_24/committees/ctte_s_wam_1/documents/testimony/20230424_17.pdf
4. Leopold, M. (2025). *How It Works: Children's Initiatives Fund. Kansas Action for Children*. https://assets.nationbuilder.com/kac/pages/630/attachments/original/1762985092/Budget_Summary_-_CIF_2025.pdf?1762985092
5. *All In For Kansas Kids Early Childhood Strategic Plan*. (2020). <https://kschildrenscabinet.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Strategic-Plan.pdf>
6. *Blueprint for Early Childhood*. (n.d.). Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. Retrieved <https://kschildrenscabinet.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Blueprint-for-Early-Childhood.pdf>
7. *Kansas Early Childhood Systems Building Needs Assessment*. (2020). <https://kschildrenscabinet.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Needs-Assessment-2020.pdf>
8. *Creating an Integrated Efficient Early Care and Education System to Support Children and Families: A State-by-State Analysis*. (2018). Bipartisan Policy Center. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/report/ece-administration-state-by-state/>
9. *Final Report of the Kansas Early Childhood Transition Task Force*. (2023). The Hunt Institute. <https://www.governor.ks.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/346/638571059704300000>
10. Transferring Certain Child Care Programs to the Kansas Office of Early Childhood and Separating Licensing Duties between the Secretary for Health and Environment and the Executive Director of Early Childhood., H.B. 2785, Kansas House of Representatives 2024.
11. Establishment of Kansas Office of Early Childhood and Updating Law Regulating Child Care Centers and Child Care Homes, H.B. 2045, Kansas Legislature 2025. Retrieved https://kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/measures/documents/hb2045_enrolled.pdf
12. Barnes, E. (2025, May 7). Establishing the Office of Early Childhood Includes Risky Changes for Children. *Kansas Action for Children*. https://www.kac.org/establishing_the_office_of_early_childhood_includes_risky_changes_for_children
13. *Kansas Office of Early Childhood Annual Report*. (2026). Kansas Office of Early Childhood. https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/KSOG/2026/01/23/file_attachments/3531644/Kansas%20Office%20of%20Early%20Childhood%20Annual%20Report%202026.pdf
14. *Governor Laura Kelly | Kansas Office of the Governor*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 11, 2026, from <https://www.governor.ks.gov/about-the-office/governor-laura-kelly>

Recommended Citation

Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center (2026). *Transforming State Early Childhood Governance: A Case Study of Kansas*. Peabody College of Education and Human Development. Vanderbilt University. <https://pn3policy.org/early-childhood-governance>.

Authors

Brief Prepared by: Becca Hanlin Lustick, MA; Cynthia Osborne, PhD; and Abby Lane, PhD

Acknowledgements: We extend a warm thank you to members of the Kansas early childhood community for their willingness to participate in the interviews that enabled this research. A special thank you to:

Brenda Bandy, Executive Director, Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition

Jackie Counts, Chief Operating Officer, Achievement and Assessment Institute, University of Kansas

Sara Gardner, Assistant Director, Center for Public Partnerships and Research, University of Kansas

Annell Harmon, Owner, Harmon and Harmon Family Child Care

David Jordan, President and CEO, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

Monica Murnan, Chief Strategic Innovation and Development Officer, Greenbush

Amanda Petersen, Director of Early Childhood, Kansas Department of Education

Christi Smith, Director, Kansas Office of Early Childhood

Zach Vincent, Transition Director of Kansas Office of Early Childhood and Director of Government Affairs and Education Policy, Office of Governor Laura Kelly

John Wilson, President and CEO, Kansas Action for Children



© April 2026, Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center, All Rights Reserved.

The Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center aims to accelerate states' equitable implementation of evidence-based policies that help all children thrive from the start. Based in Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education and Human Development and led by Dr. Cynthia Osborne, Professor of Early Childhood Education and Policy, the Center's team of researchers and nonpartisan policy experts works with policymakers, practitioners, and advocates to navigate the evidence on solutions for effective child development in the earliest years.