



## U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and U.S. Department of Education

### INTRODUCTION

**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy statement is to provide guidance to *State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care* on sustaining federal and state investments, and advancing work that supports the coordination of quality, comprehensive systems of early care and education at the state level.

**Context:** The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 authorized the creation or designation of *State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care* (SACs) in order to develop high-quality, comprehensive systems of early childhood development and care for children, birth to school entry. These governor-appointed SACs were charged with ensuring broad statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs and services in the state, including child care, Head Start, early intervention, and preschool. SACs are well-positioned to advocate at the state-level for the needs of young children and families, inform early childhood priorities, drive policy and legislative change, and/or administer public spending on early childhood-relevant programs. They are important vehicles to bring together critical decision makers for collective discussion on how to better coordinate and enhance services so that young children have the supports they need to thrive and succeed along whatever path they choose.

Under the Head Start Act, states were specifically tasked with the following:

- Conducting periodic statewide needs assessments on the quality and availability of high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs.
- Identifying opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally-funded and state-funded ECE programs and services, including collaboration and coordination among state agencies responsible for administering such programs.
- Establishing recommendations for:
  - Developing a statewide, unified data collection system.
  - Creating or enhancing a statewide professional development system and career ladder.
  - Improvements in state early learning standards and undertaking efforts to develop high-quality and comprehensive early learning standards, as appropriate.
  - Increasing participation of children in ECE programs, including outreach to underrepresented and special populations.
- Assessing the capacity and effectiveness of 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education to support the career development of early childhood educators, including the extent to which such institutions have in place articulation agreements, professional development and career advancement plans, and practice or internships for students to spend time in Head Start or pre-kindergarten programs.

The SACs were required by law to include representatives from the following as members:

- State agency responsible for child care
- State educational agency (SEA)
- Local educational agency (LEA)
- Institutions of higher education in the state
- Local providers of early childhood education and development services
- Head Start agencies, including Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs, as well as American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start
- Head Start State Collaboration Office
- State agency responsible for the programs under Part B, section 619 or Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- State agency responsible for health or mental health
- Any other agencies determined to be relevant by the governor.

Two years later, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided \$100 million for a three-year grant period (2010-2013) to support SAC activities. States were required to provide plans to sustain activities under this award beyond the grant period. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act remains in effect today and requires states to maintain SAC membership and operations regardless of Federal appropriations. The Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge discretionary grant program required applicants to have an operational SAC in order to receive a grant. Authorized by Congress in FY 2014, the Preschool Development Grants program required applicants to include a letter of support from its SAC in order to apply for funding.

**Primary Audience:** State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care

## GUIDANCE

The dedication of federal funding to support the work of the SACs was a strategic investment by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in early childhood infrastructure. This foundational work was accomplished not only as a result of federal investment, but state investment as well. Leveraging the federal contribution, states provided 70% of the resources. As states' work in early childhood education moves forward, SACs must continue their lead role in establishing a continuum of high-quality learning opportunities for young children from birth to school entry.

In 2012, the Government Accountability Office released a report that identified a wide range of federal programs that provide or may support related services to children under age 6. As a result, Congress directed the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Education (ED) to provide a plan to eliminate overlap and fragmentation and to streamline federal efforts on early childhood education. In our continuing efforts to ensure that our limited resources achieve the greatest impact for children in the most efficient way possible, SACs are a critical partner. Further, recent federal legislation, grant programs such as Early Learning Challenge, and other initiatives illustrate the expectation that SACs play a significant role in the development of ECE policy and programming. We encourage SACs to undertake the following activities:

### 1) **Keep current and relevant**

***Perform periodic needs assessments:*** To keep abreast of changing demographics and needs of children, it is important that SACs continue to conduct statewide needs assessments for timely information on the quality and availability of high-quality ECE. Based on periodic needs assessments, states can target outreach to under-represented and special

populations, including families of children with disabilities, Dual Language Learners and children experiencing homelessness, across early learning programs and fill gaps in the supply of quality settings by age group.

For example, in 2012, the Texas Council funded its first statewide comprehensive needs assessment in over 40 years. The needs assessment measured the availability and supply of ECE programs in comparison to the need and demand for services. The Council collected data about the population of young children; early childhood service providers; type of service; program; location; and socioeconomic risk factors such as living arrangements, family income, and parent employment status. The analysis also reviewed barriers to participation and school readiness by conducting a gap analysis of services and quality of ECE programs throughout the state by region. The Council used findings to identify and better articulate the array of available services for young children and families; adopt a common protocol across all services to gather program data on an annual basis; and assess the feasibility and benefits of creating a comprehensive, independent agency of early learning to administer all early childhood services, education, and care programs.

***Create unified data collection systems:*** SACs were mandated to make recommendations for developing unified early childhood data collection systems. States are in different places along the path to reaching this goal. In some states, relevant data were already being collected while, in others, gaps in data collection were identified. Some SACs have identified data sets to be linked while others are further along in developing a more integrated, centralized system. To that end, some states have established data governance to ensure agreement on the proper policies, guidelines, and elements for data collection and data sharing across child-serving sectors.

Regardless of where states are in creating shared data systems, SACs have an important role in moving forward on plans so that cross-agency data can be collected, stored, and transferred or existing data from various data systems can be linked, such as Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems, Early Childhood Integrated Data Systems, systems containing data from Kindergarten Entry Assessments, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) (e.g., Colorado, Delaware, and Texas). Using data from the different systems can help provide a more complete picture of program, family, and child needs to better target limited resources and support child and family outcomes.

For example, Utah has made efforts to align child, family, classroom, program, and workforce data across Early Head Start and Head Start, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, Part C of IDEA, Part B, section 619 of IDEA, public primary education, and child care in their Utah Early Childhood Statewide Data Integration Project (UECSDIP). To facilitate data sharing and coordination among early childhood programs, the UECSDIP assigns unique identifiers to protect the identity and privacy of children and families as child records are matched across programs. The Utah Data Alliance will also link UECSDIP with preschool-level data in Utah's comprehensive P-20W Statewide Longitudinal Data System. Utah foresees the data integration project will address whether children are on track to succeed when they enter school. The data will also inform communities regarding which children and families are and are not being served by particular programs and services; characteristics of programs that are associated with positive outcomes; and educational and economic returns on early childhood investments.

## 2) Revise statewide plans to meet identified needs

***Expand quality early learning opportunities to create a continuum of care for children from birth to kindergarten entry:*** A continuum of high quality early learning opportunities from birth support healthy cognitive, social and emotional development while helping children to stay on track and engaged in the early elementary grades. To this end, periodic needs assessments can inform state investments that increase supply of high quality early learning programs by age group and location. For example, states could leverage and expand upon new ***Early Head Start-Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership*** opportunities by providing CCDF funding to support grantees in hiring additional family service workers and health managers to enhance family engagement and developmental screening activities with child care partners.

Recently, ACF awarded \$500 million in awards to enable new or existing Early Head Start programs to partner with local child care centers and family child care providers to expand access to high-quality early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers from low-income families. EHS-CC Partnerships support working families by providing a full-day, year round program so that low-income children have the healthy and enriching early experiences they need to realize their full potential. Early Head Start programs provide comprehensive services that benefit children, families, and teachers, including health, developmental, and behavioral screenings; higher health, safety, and nutrition standards; increased professional development opportunities for teachers; and increased parent engagement opportunities.

In addition to supporting EHS-CC Partnership opportunities within a state, SACs may work with SEAs and other entities to support high quality preschool programs. While there has been progress at the federal and state levels increasing access to Head Start and state prekindergarten programs, many low- and moderate-income children still lack affordable, high quality preschool programs. The Preschool Development Grant program as authorized in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will provide states with the opportunity to expand quality preschool, through a mixed delivery system (child care, Head Start, and schools meeting the same high standards), and reach more children so that they will be ready for success in school. SACs should also collaborate with the IDEA Part C State Interagency Coordinating Council to ensure that infants and toddlers with disabilities are being referred and identified for services under Part C of IDEA, and with the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel to ensure that children with disabilities ages three through five are being referred and identified for services under Part B of IDEA.<sup>1</sup>

***Expand quality early care and education opportunities for children experiencing homelessness:*** ECE programs provide tremendous benefit to all children, especially our nation's most vulnerable. Quality ECE programs buffer the challenges and risks associated

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<sup>1</sup> Under Part C of the IDEA, States are required to establish State Interagency Coordinating Councils to advise and assist the IDEA Part C lead agency. Under Part B of the IDEA, States are required to establish State Advisory Panels to provide policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State.

with homelessness by supporting children’s learning and development in safe, stable, and nurturing environments.

SACs can help to align policies and regulations between programs and services funded through Head Start, CCDF, and IDEA to ensure that services to homeless children and their families are consistent and family-friendly. As previously mentioned, SACs were charged with conducting a needs assessment to identify barriers to high-quality early childhood education and care, identifying opportunities for collaboration among existing programs, and developing recommendations for increasing participation in early childhood education and care programs for underrepresented and special needs populations.

Four SACs (Montana, Connecticut, Vermont, and Kentucky) gave specific attention to children experiencing homelessness in their needs assessment and plan. For example, Montana’s SAC focused on the increase in family homelessness due to rising housing prices and the barriers these families faced accessing high-quality early childhood education and care. Their recommendations included educating local, state, and federal officials on housing’s crucial role in supporting stable environments for children and implementing crisis and prevention support services for families experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

In addition, we encourage SACs to broaden membership to include or coordinate with McKinney-Vento State Coordinators. Per the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act), amended most recently by the ESSA, there must be a Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youths, along with local liaisons designated by each of the LEAs, in each state.

Local liaisons identify homeless children and youths and connect them to programs and services for which they are eligible, such as Head Start, preschool, IDEA services, health care services, dental services, mental health services, housing, and other appropriate services. CCDF lead agencies and child care resource and referral agencies are encouraged to work with these State Coordinators and local liaisons to ensure that they have information on the full range of child care services available for families. The Head Start Act requires grantees to coordinate with McKinney-Vento local liaisons to remove barriers and increase participation of homeless children in the Head Start program.

The McKinney-Vento Act requires state plans to include a description of procedures that ensure that homeless children have access to public preschool programs administered by the SEA or LEA, as provided to other children. The ESSA expands the definition for “school of origin” to include preschool. Therefore, if it is in a child’s best interest to remain in a preschool program, transportation must be provided for the duration of homelessness and until the end of the school year in which the child becomes permanently housed in order to support school stability.

Under Parts B and C of IDEA, states are required to ensure that all children with disabilities and their families who are experiencing homelessness are identified, located, and evaluated. It is important that Part C and Part B, section 619, programs work with the State Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth and the Head Start State

Collaboration Office to ensure that young children with disabilities who are homeless are being referred to Parts B and C of IDEA for early identification and appropriate services.

***Develop statewide disaster preparedness plans that address the needs of all children in early care and education settings:*** In 2012 alone, there were 112 disaster declarations, totaling over \$85.7 billion in economic impact. Natural and manmade disasters can happen anywhere and at any time. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 requires that SACs be involved in developing the statewide disaster preparedness plans that address the needs of children in child care services. Specifically, the statewide plan must address the following:

- Evacuation, relocation, shelter-in-place, and lock-down procedures, and procedures for communication and reunification with families, continuity of operations, and accommodation of infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children with chronic medical conditions;
- Guidelines for the continuation of child care services in the period following the emergency or disaster, which may include the provision of emergency and temporary child care services, and temporary operating standards for child care providers during that period; and
- Procedures for staff and volunteer emergency preparedness training and practice drills.

Coordination of the aforementioned activities must take place through collaboration among the state agencies with jurisdiction over human services, state emergency planning, licensing of child care providers in addition to the state lead child care agency, local resource and referral organizations, state resource and referral system and SACs.

### **3) Align policies and leverage funding across early childhood programs**

Coordination and collaboration across early childhood programs and the agencies that administer them is not a one-time event. In addition to maintaining the required composition of SAC membership, it is important to build and maintain relationships with Early Childhood Comprehensive System Impact grantees, IDEA Part B State Advisory Panels and IDEA Part C State Interagency Coordinating Councils, and others. In addition to changing state demographics and needs of children, programs requirements and resources, whether at the federal or state level, are not static. There are always new challenges and opportunities for partnerships to align priorities and leverage resources to fulfill those priorities.

***Encourage healthy child development, comprehensive developmental and behavioral screening, effective linkage to services, and follow up:*** As many as one in four children through the age of five are at risk for a developmental delay or disability. Early identification allows communities to intervene earlier, which can help mitigate this risk, change children's developmental trajectories, and minimize the need for or cost of providing special education services when children enter school.

In 2014, HHS and ED launched [\*Birth to 5: Watch Me Thrive!\*](#), a coordinated federal effort to encourage healthy child development, universal developmental and behavioral screening for children, and support for the families and providers who care for them. The public campaign helps families and providers to (1) celebrate milestones, (2) promote universal screening, (3) identify possible delays, and (4) to enhance developmental supports. [\*Birth to\*](#)

*5: Watch Me Thrive!* draws heavily on previous developmental and behavioral screening efforts by consolidating free, publicly available materials from a wide array of federal agencies and their non-federal partners while offering new resources.

For example, there is a [compendium](#) of research-based developmental screening tools appropriate for use with children under the age of 5 across a wide range of settings. ECE providers, pediatricians, home visitors, child welfare case workers, behavioral health professionals, early intervention specialists, and various other relevant partners who serve families with young children can use this reference to learn the cost, administration time, quality level, training required, and age range covered for each screening tool.

In addition, guides tailored to specific audiences are available that address the importance of developmental and behavioral screening, how to talk to families, where to go for help, and how to select the most appropriate screening tool for the population served. There is also a guide for communities to foster early childhood systems that support developmental and behavioral screening, follow up, referral, and closing the loop.

While each guide is specifically written for particular stakeholders, there are common messages woven across all guides. A collection of electronic resources is also available that includes materials, information, and contact information from each partner agency and relevant grantees, that will serve to bring awareness to parents and providers about general early child development, how and where to get help if a concern exists, tips and techniques to help children with disabilities, concerns or delays, and free online training modules on a range of topics.

***Streamline enrollment for families who are eligible for multiple public benefits that support child health and development.*** We encourage SACs to bring together representatives from state Medicaid agencies and lead child care agencies to streamline program enrollment. The CCDBG Act of 2014 establishes a minimum 12-month eligibility re-determination period for CCDF families, regardless of changes in income (as long as income does not exceed the federal threshold of 85 percent of state median income) or temporary changes in participation in work, training, or education activities. Similarly, states may provide children with 12 months of continuous health care coverage through Medicaid and CHIP, even if the family's income changes during the year. Guaranteeing ongoing coverage ensures that children get appropriate care as well as needed screenings, and helps doctors develop relationships with children and their families. Continuous eligibility for Medicaid eliminates cycling on and off of coverage during the year. Continuous eligibility for CCDF allows for consistent support and peace of mind for working families in addition to the benefits of a continuous, nurturing relationship between the child and caregiver. Coordination of CCDF and Medicaid enrollment reduces state time and money that would be spent on unnecessary paperwork and preventable care needs.

***Align licensing requirements and monitoring efforts.*** Great progress has been made in states to safeguard children in out of home care, yet more work must be done to ensure children can learn, play, and grow in settings that are safe and secure. States vary widely in the number and content of health and safety standards, as well as the means by which they monitor compliance. While there are differences in health and safety requirements by funding stream (e.g. Head Start, CCDF, and Child and Adult Care Food Program), early childhood program type (e.g. center-based, home-based) and length of time in care, there are

basic standards that must be in place to protect children no matter what type of variation in program.

Until recently, there has been no federal guidance to assist states in creating basic, consistent health and safety standards across ECE settings. In 2015, ACF released [\*Caring for Our Children Basics: Health and Safety Foundations for Early Care and Education\*](#), a set of recommended minimum health and safety standards experts believe should be in place where children are cared for outside of their homes. *Caring for our Children Basics* seeks to reduce conflicts and redundancies found in program standards linked to multiple funding streams. SACs should work to align licensing requirements across programs, improve efficiencies in monitoring systems, and/or enhance QRIS using this voluntary set of recommendations. While it is not a federal requirement, *Caring for Our Children Basics* should serve as a guide; it is referenced in both the proposed update of Head Start Program Performance Standards as well as the recently proposed amendments to CCDF regulations in response to the CCDBG Act of 2014.

***Improve the knowledge, skills, and abilities of early childhood teachers, administrators, and staff along a progression of professional development:*** Adults who care for and educate young children bear great responsibility for their health, development, and learning. Improving the professional development and practice of the early childhood workforce is vital to meeting the diverse, sometimes challenging, needs of young children and families served in ECE settings. Over the past years, SACs have made progress in creating or enhancing statewide professional development systems and career ladders.

In order to build on existing work and align with opportunities in the state's training framework, the recently reauthorized CCDBG Act of 2014 requires states to certify that their CCDF state plan is developed in consultation with their SAC. Specifically, SACs should be involved in the design of state professional development and training plans that improve the knowledge and skills of the child care workforce. Ongoing training that contributes to a progression of professional development must reflect current research and best practices to promote the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of all children. States may use the CCDBG quality set-aside to provide training to support the developmental needs of children, increase high-quality inclusive practices for children with disabilities, in addition to engaging parents and families in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council recently released [\*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation\*](#) to give recommendations to improve ongoing professional development among early childhood professionals; strengthen teacher qualifications based on knowledge and competencies; and promote evaluation that leads to continuous improvements in professional practices. In addition to encouraging on-site practice-based professional development opportunities, such as coaching, the comprehensive review gives practical, research-based targets that move the field toward more education for our teachers and directors, culminating in a bachelor's degree for all lead teachers. SACs should use this guiding framework to establish their own education targets for the early childhood workforce in their states. While each state will have a different starting point, SACs can take critical steps to ensure that training funded with public dollars is credit bearing and that institutions of higher learning are engaged. The IOM study, coupled with CCDBG's call for



a progression of professional development, presents an opportunity that SACs should pursue immediately to strengthen quality in ECE settings.

***Promote consistent training across programs and settings that serve young children:***

SACs should bring together decision makers and leaders in health, nutrition, mental health, and social services to review their standards, practices, and systems for professional education and incorporate consistent expectations for fundamental understanding in child development, as well as the competencies needed to work with young children and collaborate with ECE professionals. Efforts could include interagency pooling of resources to support clearinghouses, professional assessments, joint trainings, and other means of better coordinating professional learning systems. Titles I and II of the ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, include provisions for SEAs and LEAs to expand professional development opportunities to include early childhood providers and to expand the child development knowledge of principals and other school leaders.

For example, the Tribal Early Learning Initiative is a partnership between ACF and four American Indian tribes that have Head Start/Early Head Start, CCDF, and Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting grants. The goal of the initiative is to create and support seamless, high-quality early childhood systems of tribal early learning and development programs; raise the quality of services to children and families across the prenatal-to-age-5 continuum; and identify and break down barriers to collaboration and systems improvement. Of particular relevance to professional development, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma has conducted joint trainings for early childhood professionals who care for children with special health care needs. They conduct one shared early childhood training day each fiscal year to foster consistent communication and collaboration between early childhood programs, including appropriate topic experts, team-building activities, and cultural integration.

ACF recently announced a jointly administered Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) system to more effectively support ECE programs, administrators, and educators in delivering quality services to children and their families across the country. The newly enhanced system will implement a continuum of services based on the same science to meet the range of developmental needs of all young children and professionals who care for them. Most importantly, the new system will work to simplify and clarify guidance in addition to enhancing dissemination of existing and new evidence-based resources to reach a broader audience—particularly at the local program level.

SACs can play an important role in disseminating these high-quality materials across sectors as they work to promote consistent quality and joint participation in professional development across early childhood programs. Instead of duplicating public expenditures to create materials, SACs can invest in broad dissemination networks and direct assistance to providers. For more information and resources, please visit the ACF [Early Childhood T/TA System](#), [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#) and [Child Care T/TA Network](#) and ED's [Technical Assistance Investments](#).

***Develop and clearly communicate expulsion and suspension policies:*** Recent data indicate that expulsions and suspensions occur with regularity in preschool settings, a problematic issue given the well-established research indicating that these practices can influence a number of adverse outcomes across development, health, and education. In

addition, stark racial and gender disparities exist in these practices, with young boys of color being suspended and expelled at much higher rates than other children in early learning programs.<sup>2</sup>

SACs should establish statewide policies to promote children's social-emotional and behavioral health and eliminate or severely limit the use of expulsion, suspension, and other exclusionary discipline practices. Exclusionary measures should only be used as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a determination of a serious safety threat that cannot otherwise be reduced or eliminated by the provision of reasonable modifications. All discipline policies must comply with Federal civil rights laws.

Should a situation arise where there is documented evidence that all possible interventions and supports recommended by a qualified professional have been exhausted and it has been determined that transitioning a child to another program is necessary for the well-being of the child or his or her peers, the state should encourage programs to take a series of documented steps to ensure a smooth transition into another setting that offers a rich social context and opportunities for peer interaction.

If the child has a disability and is receiving services under Part B of IDEA, the state must ensure that applicable procedural safeguards and requirements are met. In addition, the state is responsible for nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in its programs, including in the administration of discipline, in compliance with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Many states currently address behavior and discipline in their child care licensing regulations. Adding explicit policies on expulsion and suspension is an important next step. These policies and procedures should be clearly communicated to all relevant parties, including programs, schools, families, and relevant community partners.

Under the CCDBG Act of 2014, states are required to disseminate consumer education information to parents, the general public, and child care providers. These efforts must include information about state policies regarding the social-emotional behavioral health of young children, which may include positive behavior intervention and support models, and policies on the suspension and expulsion of young children in early childhood programs receiving assistance under CCDF. For more information, please reference the HHS and ED [\*\*Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings\*\*](#).

***Create or strengthen a focus on early childhood inclusion:*** All young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities. Teachers and program leaders should hold high expectations and intentionally promote participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations, and use evidence-based services and supports

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014). Data Snapshot: Early Childhood Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-early-learning-snapshot.pdf>

to foster all domains of development, friendships with peers, and sense of belonging for these children.

When developing high-quality, comprehensive systems of early childhood development and care for children, birth to school entry, SACs should ensure that policies and investments support a system that provides access to inclusive early learning opportunities and is prepared to meet the individualized needs of all children. SACs should provide leadership in bringing together different sectors and groups within the state and, at a minimum, include representatives from Part B, section 619, of IDEA, Part C of IDEA, Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, home visiting, public health, pediatricians, Medicaid, the SEA, LEAs, elementary schools, mental health, related services organizations, specialized service providers, family networks, and family support organizations.

SACs can set concrete goals for expanding access to inclusive, high-quality early learning programs and track progress in achieving these goals. For example, each level in a quality framework should include indicators applicable to children with disabilities, as opposed to indicators specific to children with disabilities being optional or only applying at the highest level of a framework. Based on state needs assessments, SACs should review how resources are allocated and how they can be reallocated to better support increased access to inclusive early childhood programs. SACs should consider using funds across multiple early childhood programs, particularly funds with other early childhood funding streams.

SACs should also ensure that inclusion is meaningfully addressed in professional development efforts, and that efforts are inclusive of paraprofessionals and aides, center-based and family child care providers, teachers, directors and principals, and other leaders. For more information and resources, please refer to the HHS and ED [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#).

***Develop policies to support children who are Dual Language Learners:*** There is a large and growing population of children in the U.S. who are *dual language learners* (DLLs) – those who have a home language other than English and are learning two or more languages at the same time, or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. It is well established that supporting bilingualism from early ages can have wide-ranging benefits for children, from cognitive and social advantages early in life, to long-term employment opportunities and competitiveness in the workplace later in life.<sup>3</sup> Despite this, research indicates that there is a gap in academic achievement for children who are DLLs compared to their monolingual English-speaking peers.<sup>4</sup>

SACs can play a pivotal role in ensuring that these children are ready to succeed when they enter school by promoting a culture within the state that embraces diversity and celebrates

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<sup>3</sup>Callahan, R. M., & Gándara, P. C. (Eds.). (2014). *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the US labor market* (Vol. 99). Multilingual Matters; Ferjan Ramirez, N., & Kuhl, P. (2016). Bilingual language learning in children. University of Washington Institute for Learning and Brain Science. Retrieved from: [http://ilabs.uw.edu/Bilingual\\_Language\\_Learning\\_in\\_Children.pdf](http://ilabs.uw.edu/Bilingual_Language_Learning_in_Children.pdf); Espinosa, L. (2013). Pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup>: Challenging common myths about dual language learners. Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from: <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Challenging%20Common%20Myths%20Update.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Murphey, D. (2014). *The Academic Achievement of English Language Learners: Data for the U.S. and Each of the States*. Child Trends Research Brief.

bilingualism as an asset to build on. SACs should work with relevant state agencies to ensure that the early childhood system in the state meets the developmental and learning needs of *all* children, including children who are DLLs. All relevant state plans should take into consideration children who are DLLs, including, but not limited to: how to promote the learning and development of these children; policies for communicating with families of DLLs in a language they understand; strategies for outreach, recruitment and enrollment of these children into early learning programs; and expectations for early learning programs that are serving these children. SACs should ensure that state agencies are working with the best information possible when making decisions, by assisting agencies in compiling data on the number of children who are DLLs in the state and their characteristics. Such information can inform resource allocation and outreach strategies across the early childhood system.

SACs should also confirm that children who are DLLs are considered in all statewide policies and systems that support early learning. For instance, children who are DLLs should be incorporated across all domains in State Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs). ELGs should also have indicators specific to children who are DLLs, such as expectations for the development of the home language and English.

Quality rating and improvement systems should include indicators specific to children who are DLLs. Example indicators might include: providing information to families in their primary language, employing bilingual staff who are appropriately credentialed and speak the home language of the children who are DLLs in the program, requiring professional development for staff on supporting the development of these children, including strategies to support the continued development of the home language, alongside English; or implementing an evidence-based curriculum, as well as clear and intentional plans for how to support children's home and English language development.

Finally, SACs should assist state agencies and local programs in developing a workforce that is culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of all children and their families. All levels of the early learning workforce, from directors to frontline teachers, should meet certain expectations for cultural competence, understanding of dual language development and how to foster it, and respectful communication with families of DLLs. The workforce should also have access to on-going professional development opportunities and technical assistance focused on improving services for children who are DLLs.

SACs should also support programs in developing career pathways for existing bilingual staff in the early childhood field who are language assets in the programs, but do not yet have the appropriate credentials to serve as lead teachers or program directors. As language resources may be scarce in some communities, particularly rural areas, SACs may consider establishing or expanding "community hubs" that would pool language resources- both human and material- for a wider array of providers and families to use. These hubs could be staffed by professionals who would assist programs in screening and assessing young children who are DLLs; family service workers that could partner and work with families who may be limited in their English proficiency; and coaches who could conduct shared trainings and coaching to teachers and providers. These hubs could also serve as lending libraries, where families could find books, music, and other materials to promote language and literacy development, in many of the native languages of the families in their community.

For more information and additional recommendations, please reference the HHS and ED [Policy Statement on Supporting the Development of Children who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs](#).

***Ensure smooth transitions for children and families between early childhood programs and services as well as between early childhood and public school settings:***

Preschool children make the transition into kindergarten more successfully when their schools and families prepare for it together, and when their preschool and kindergarten teachers connect. It is also important to consider the comprehensive supports (e.g., early intervention services, stable housing, and access to health services) a family must have in place to make a successful transition. By coordinating transition efforts, infant and toddler, preschool, and elementary programs can help children maintain and maximize the gains they made in preschool.

The ESEA, as amended by the ESSA, requires districts that receive Title I, Part A funds to develop coordination agreements with Head Start and other early learning programs to provide for smoother transitions from preschool to elementary school. In addition, the Head Start Act requires programs to support parents in the transition of children into Head Start and from Head Start to public school. For example, Head Start assists parents of children with disabilities entering from infant/toddler programs by providing information to parents on how to foster the development of their child with disabilities; opportunities for parents to observe large group, small group and individual activities; and follow-up assistance and activities to reinforce program activities at home. They are also required to refer parents to groups of parents of children with disabilities who can provide helpful peer support. Head Start programs inform parents of their rights under IDEA and build parent confidence, skills, and knowledge in accessing resources to meet the special needs of their children. Parts B and C of the IDEA include requirements to ensure that children receiving early intervention services under Part C of the IDEA experience a smooth and effective transition to preschool programs assisted under Part B, section 619 of the IDEA.

To ensure continuous and consistent high-quality learning opportunities, SACs should support all children and families by aligning policies and leveraging resources from existing state and local agencies that provide early childhood services, including Part C of IDEA and Part B, section 619 of IDEA, Early Head Start and Head Start, home visiting, child care, state preschool programs, family supports and engagement resources, housing, health, and mental health services.

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The SACs have been and will continue to be essential as our Nation moves forward in ensuring that all children have the opportunity to access quality early learning experiences. For specific examples and more information, please visit the ACF Early Childhood Development webpage at [www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd) to access the [State Advisory Council Final Report 2015](#).

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