

Blueprint for Zero to Five (Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative)
**Ready Families + Ready Communities + Ready Services + Ready Schools
= Ready Children With Bright Futures**

1) READY FAMILIES in READY COMMUNITIES – Parents and families play the most critical role in children’s healthy development. Mother’s limited educational level and being born to a single mother are two of the most powerful predictors of poor outcomes. Parents need a wide range of supports and connections to provide stable homes where children can thrive. Community emphasis should be on empowering families as first teachers and as primary caregivers and supporters of children.

Actions and Programs: Parent Leadership Training (train the trainer) to build local capacity of providers and parents; continued distribution of Parenting Kits to parents of newborns, with revised and updated materials; continued emphasis on Zero to Five Matters; new public awareness campaign targeted at parents to encourage them to choose high quality child care and early learning programs (Don’t Be In The Dark About Child Care). Promote the Strengthening Families framework, a protective factors approach, including training, coordination, and resources for cross-systems implementation in partnership with state agency partners and local implementation agencies. Support for home visiting programs that enable strong, effective parenting and attention to young children’s developmental needs.

2) READY SERVICES – HEALTH – Access to health insurance and a medical home are necessary for children’s optimum development. This includes prenatal care, well-baby check-ups and immunizations, and detection and treatment of illness and delays, including social and emotional health and well-being.

Actions and Programs: Expansion of developmental screening by identifying participants, assisting with materials development and training opportunities for all provider types, and modifying the resource/referral matrix for use by a wider range of practitioners (child care providers, family resource centers, etc.); continue to assist local communities in identifying and easing access to medical homes; identify child nutrition and anti-obesity materials for a broad campaign. Advocate for continued funding for AllKids and Medicaid for children. In 2016 statewide expansion of Help Me Grow Alabama in partnership with Department of Early Care and Education and Department of Mental Health/ Project LAUNCH provides statewide access to screening/assessment, referrals to appropriate services and interventions, ongoing care coordination, and ease of access and participation for parents and families.

3) READY SERVICES – EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION – Working families need access to dependable, high quality child care, and children benefit from developmentally appropriate programs with a commitment to high quality experiences. In a variety of settings, children can benefit from access to programs that are staffed by well-educated, caring teachers who provide a language-rich experience based on children’s developmental levels. For all children, but especially for children with multiple risk factors, this is the single best way to narrow achievement gaps and level the playing field so that all children enter school prepared to succeed.

Actions: Support the Alabama School Readiness Alliance and lead additional efforts to support sustained or increased funding for high quality PreK and child care for working families; implement statewide parent awareness initiative about the importance of choosing high quality care as a foundation on which to build a quality enhancement/rating system – enhancing parent understanding about high quality and increasing their demand for high quality; continued work to improve the education levels and retention in the early learning workforce. Engage early childhood providers in Help Me Grow and Strengthening Families as a way to reach children and families early and connect them to needed resources.

Early Childhood Advisory Council – develop recommendations for increasing participation in existing programs; assess capacity and effectiveness of higher education in supporting early childhood educators; develop recommendations for improving Early Learning Standards; develop recommendations regarding professional development and career advancement plans for early childhood educators.

4) **READY SCHOOLS** –The transition into Kindergarten and the first few grades often lay the foundation for success or failure in school. Schools can provide leadership and guidance for a better transition to improve the likelihood of early success, and schools are uniquely situated to share key data about kindergarten readiness.

Actions: Expand use of School Transition Materials by providing training and materials to PreK sites, schools, child care and early learning programs (Head Start), adding on-line access; continue to advocate for implementation of a school readiness assessment at school entry (Teaching Strategies GOLD); continue work to develop local Transition Teams to implement community-wide plans; develop a seamless and well-coordinated P-3 plan that ensures developmentally appropriate programming in the early grades.

5) **READY STATES** – Partners working on the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems have clearly identified the resources and critical needs in the state. We have worked collectively to implement research-based programs and actions that will improve the indicators identified as priorities. Through several joint initiatives, the group has effectively changed or modified policy to break down barriers and facilitate change (AABCD Initiative). There are other key areas where the group now looks to state leaders for guidance, assistance, and leadership so that we are able to move the agenda forward. *Ready States* requires that we carefully assess policy, funding and accountability processes across systems, and this can only be accomplished by the highest level of state leadership.

Actions: Build on the *Ready States* work done through the ECCS grant and coordinate with an effective Early Childhood Advisory Council; offer the state plan and Blueprint as the foundation for the ECAC work; lead the effort to host regional summits of business leaders to emphasize the economic impact and return on investment for investments in young children; continue to advocate at the state legislature and through the (10) state agency heads that serve on the agency’s board of directors to ensure awareness of funding and policy needs in all ECCS/Blueprint component areas. It will be important that we host well-planned and meaningful quarterly meetings of the Blueprint Advisory Committee so that this strong and diverse group leads the advocacy and education efforts through the current difficult financial conditions in the state.

Early Childhood Advisory Council – conduct periodic needs assessments for children birth to school entry; identify opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federal and state-funded programs; provide leadership for investments needed to address priorities and concerns across the broad early childhood system of care.

