



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
Early Childhood
Education

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education

2019 PDGB-5 Strategic Plan Report



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I. Executive Summary

In December 2018, Alabama’s Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) was awarded a Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five (PDGB-5) from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services. This grant afforded Alabama the opportunity to conduct a thorough review of existing birth to five needs assessments to identify current needs and priorities. ADECE submitted its Needs Assessment Report in August 2019 and received federal approval of the report in September 2019. The needs assessment process then guided the state to continue its work under PDGB-5 to comprehensively develop a strategic plan that facilitates collaboration and coordination between existing state programs of early care and education in a mixed delivery system across the state.

ADECE’s PDGB-5 Strategic Plan Report includes background information on the needs assessment and stakeholder engagement process; outlines the strategic planning process; details the goals, goal statements, objectives, preliminary action steps and measurable indicators of progress in the strategic plan; describes alignment of the strategic plan to the needs assessment report; and addresses governance, resources and collaboration related to implementation of the strategic plan.

The work of the B-5 grant was guided by the Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Steering Committee, a diverse group of key stakeholders convened from across the state, including members from the State’s federally designated Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC). More information about the involvement of the Steering Committee is included in the process sections below, and a list of Steering Committee members and the organizations they represent are included in this report as [Attachment 1](#).

The strategic plan was guided by ADECE’s mission “to inspire, support and deliver a cohesive, comprehensive, mixed delivery system of high-quality education and care so that all Alabama children thrive and learn.” Additionally, ADECE and the Steering Committee consistently referred to the vision for Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education that “All Alabama children are healthy and emotionally ready to enter kindergarten, particularly low-income and disadvantaged children, and strong supports are provided to assist families in making informed choices” throughout the planning process, and all of the goals, goal statements, objectives and preliminary action steps are aligned to this vision.

ADECE’s strategic planning process was divided into three phases: a Kickoff Meeting with the Steering Committee which included a full review of the Need Assessment Report, a Strategic Planning Session with the Steering Committee which included creation of the components of the strategic plan, and lastly the development of the finalized strategic plan and accompanying report by ADECE. More information about the strategic planning process is outlined below, and agendas for the sessions are included as attachments to this report.

ADECE is pleased to present its 2020-2022 Strategic Plan within this report, thereby concluding Activity Two of its 2019 B-5 grant.

II. Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement Process

Activity One of the 2019 PDGB-5 included a comprehensive review of current, existing birth to five needs assessments in the state. Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Steering Committee members helped gather numerous documents as part of this process, and a total of 59 needs assessments, supporting reports and resources were thoroughly reviewed. The emergent needs and priorities identified through the review process were analyzed and combined with data from the qualitative stakeholder engagement process outlined below to produce the 2019 PDGB-5 Needs Assessment Report.

The PDGB-5 Steering Committee and ADECE also thoughtfully designed a robust qualitative stakeholder engagement process to supplement the comprehensive review of existing needs assessments. The Steering Committee provided suggestions for key informants to participate in one-on-one or small group interviews and identified participants for focus groups convened across the state. Steering Committee members also gave input on the design of the interview and focus group questions. These questions were carefully designed to gather key informants' and focus group participants' unique perspectives and experiences with high-quality childcare in the state and to offer each an opportunity to prioritize the needs to be addressed.

During the stakeholder engagement process, 39 key individuals representing early care and education, healthcare, mental health, the business community, and supporters and partners of early childhood education in Alabama were engaged in one-on-one or small group interviews. A list of interview participants can be found in [Attachment 2](#).

Focus groups with both families and service providers were also convened across the state as part of the qualitative data collection process to gather input on experiences with childcare, availability of high-quality childcare and coordination of childcare systems to strengthen and improve the state's birth to five early childhood system. Conveners for provider focus groups were given guidance to recruit service providers from diverse backgrounds representing the mixed delivery system, including both licensed and exempt centers, home-based care providers, representatives from higher education institutions which provide degrees, certification or training related to early childhood education, and other key partner agencies and childhood service providers from community, faith-based or tribal groups. Similarly, family focus group conveners were given guidelines on recruiting participants to help ensure socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and educational diversity to include typically under-represented populations such as families with special needs children and families for which English is not their first language.

In total, 433 individuals participated in 28 focus groups conducted state-wide. Sixteen of the focus groups were conducted with service providers within Alabama's early childhood care and education system, including executive directors, program directors, and front-line workers (275 participants), while twelve focus groups were conducted with family representatives such as parents, grandparents, foster parents and guardians (158 participants). A table outlining the locations, types and number of participants for Provider and Family Focus Groups are included in this report as [Attachments 3 and 4](#), respectively. The locations of focus groups were mapped against the Governor's Regional Workforce Councils with at least one family group and one provider group held in each region (though many regions had 3-4 focus groups

each), ensuring diverse geographic representation across the state, including rural areas. A map denoting the locations of all 28 focus groups is included as [Attachment 5](#) to this report.

The findings outlined in the PDGB-5 Needs Assessment Report were based on a comprehensive analysis of data and feedback from interviews, focus groups, and the collection of existing needs assessments in the state. The PDGB-5 Needs Assessment Report was submitted for federal review in August 2019 and approved in September 2019, concluding Activity One. The feedback and information gathered through the comprehensive needs assessment and stakeholder engagement processes was then used to identify goals, objectives, action steps and measurable indicators of progress to develop the PDGB-5 Strategic Plan, ensuring that the full range of stakeholders contributed to the development of the strategic plan.

III. Strategic Planning Process

Building on the data collected and momentum generated in Activity One, ADECE sought to develop a strategic plan that prioritized creating an ECCE system with strong collaboration, coordination and quality improvement activities while addressing the identified needs outlined in the needs assessment report. ADECE's PDGB-5 strategic planning process included three phases, guided by its vision that "All Alabama children are healthy and emotionally ready to enter kindergarten, particularly low-income and disadvantaged children, and that strong supports are provided to assist families in making informed choices," and its mission, "To inspire, support and deliver a cohesive, comprehensive, mixed delivery system of high-quality education and care so that all Alabama children thrive and learn." Each phase of the strategic planning process is described in detail below:

Phase One: Strategic Planning Kickoff Meeting

During Phase One, the PDGB-5 Steering Committee reviewed findings from the comprehensive needs assessment and stakeholder engagement process. The committee then used these emergent needs to identify and create strategic goals. After discussion and consensus on the strategic goals, the committee developed preliminary goal statements to guide the objectives and action steps toward achieving each goal. An agenda for the Strategic Planning Kickoff Meeting is included as [Attachment 6](#) to this report.

Phase Two: Strategic Planning Session

Following the strategic planning kickoff meeting, ADECE convened a full-day planning session with the PDGB-5 Steering Committee to continue work on creating the PDGB-5 strategic plan. The strategic goals and goal statements were reviewed, and the majority of the day was spent developing objectives and preliminary action steps. The Steering Committee also created proposed timelines for accomplishing each of the objectives and began identifying measurable indicators of progress to track ADECE's success in accomplishing each goal. Coordination and collaboration among programs and systems was a guiding principle discussed throughout the strategic planning session that influenced the design of the strategic plan. An agenda for the Strategic Planning Session is included as [Attachment 7](#) to this report.

Phase Three: Strategic Plan Report

In the last phase of the strategic planning process, ADECE used the PDGB-5 Needs Assessment Report and the framework designed by the Steering Committee at the planning sessions to finalize its PDGB-5 Strategic Plan. The strategic plan identifies the steps ADECE will take to improve the current ECCE system

and better meet the needs of the key stakeholders, primarily families with young children, ECCE educators, and ECCE providers. A clear, concise grid which details all components of the strategic plan is included below.

IV. Strategic Plan

A. Strategic Plan Grid

Components of the strategic plan are outlined in the grid on the following page.

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

Vision

All Alabama children are healthy and emotionally ready to enter Kindergarten, particularly low-income and disadvantaged children, and strong supports are provided to assist families in making informed choices

Mission

To inspire, support, and deliver a cohesive, comprehensive, mixed delivery system of high-quality education and care so that all Alabama children thrive and learn

Goals

<i>Access & Affordability</i>	<i>Family Partnerships & Support</i>	<i>Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Workforce</i>	<i>Quality & Accountability</i>
Ensure high-quality early care and education services are accessible and affordable to all	Engage families as partners in early care and education; and provide access to comprehensive support services	Build and retain a highly skilled and well-supported early care and education workforce	Ensure all early care and education programs are of the highest quality; and maintain support for and accountability to rigorous standards

Objectives

<p>A1: Create a sustainable funding system by broadening and blending diverse funding sources and innovative supports</p> <p>A2: Increase service capacity for children ages birth to five, with a focus on birth to three</p> <p>A3: Expand access and strengthen services to vulnerable populations</p> <p>A4: Offer families and providers comprehensive and clear information about programs and services to facilitate informed choices</p> <p>A5: Decrease length of waiting periods for children to access high quality ECCE programs</p>	<p>B1: Promote families as children’s first and most important teachers and advocates through increased family engagement</p> <p>B2: Increase family knowledge and choice about services and supports</p> <p>B3: Partner with families to support seamless transitions from ECCE programs to elementary schools</p> <p>B4: Support economic security for families by connecting them with family strengthening services and resources</p>	<p>C1: Strengthen recruitment strategies and offer attractive benefits for ECCE professionals</p> <p>C2: Design and communicate clear pathways from education and training to high demand early care and education jobs</p> <p>C3: Expand evidence-based and interdisciplinary professional development for early care and education professionals</p>	<p>D1: Create, sustain, and expand high quality ECCE programs</p> <p>D2: Address barriers and provide support for childcare centers pursuing licensure</p> <p>D3: Increase provider participation in monitoring systems such as CLASS and STARS/QRIS</p> <p>D4: Develop a coordinated and compatible data system to collect and connect existing data from multiple points and providers</p> <p>D5: Engage in continuous quality improvement to support accountability and data-driven decision-making</p> <p>D6: Collaboratively create unified early childhood standards of quality across state departments</p> <p>D7: Align early childhood policies and define legislative priorities across systems to support and promote building a strong educational foundation from birth to five</p>
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FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE: Collaboration with partners across systems to achieve successful outcomes for children and families

B. Preliminary Action Steps

Access & Affordability

GOAL: Ensure high-quality early care and education services are accessible and affordable to all

A1: Create a sustainable funding system by broadening and blending diverse funding sources and innovative supports

- **A1a:** Conduct a funding analysis to identify gaps and opportunities, to ensure equitable allocation of resources and to reduce duplication of services
- **A1b:** Increase subsidy payments to assist with the cost of care for all children, including for children with special needs
- **A1c:** Seek additional financial investment from the business community

A2: Increase service capacity for children ages birth to five, with a focus on birth to three

- **A2a:** Analyze data on early childhood care and education deserts to determine greatest areas of need regarding access and capacity
- **A2b:** Assess and develop strategies to address barriers impacting preschool children's access to after school and out of school care

A3: Expand access and strengthen services to vulnerable populations

- **A3a:** Add paraprofessionals and aids in ECCE programs to support vulnerable populations
- **A3b:** Utilize clinical early childhood mental health consultants to provide support and care to children who have experienced trauma
- **A3c:** Revise the *Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children* with a focus on increasing cultural awareness and responsiveness
- **A3d:** Provide professional development learning opportunities to mitigate disproportionality in data and disparate treatment of vulnerable student populations

A4: Offer families and providers comprehensive and clear information about programs and services to facilitate informed choices

- **A4a:** Create and promote a centralized database for early care and education programs, services and supports to connect families to resources

A5: Decrease length of waiting periods for children to access high quality ECCE programs

- **A5a:** Develop a system to identify the number of unduplicated children waiting to be served in ECCE programs

Family Partnerships & Support

GOAL: Engage families as partners in early care and education; and provide access to comprehensive support services

B1: Promote families as children’s first and most important teachers and advocates through increased family engagement

- **B1a:** Partner with pediatricians to develop a system of providing information on the benefits of holistic care, including child development, health, education and well-being
- **B1b:** Strengthen supportive parent networks and peer mentorship programs to connect families of young children

B2: Increase family knowledge and choice about services and supports

- **B2a:** Develop and implement an innovative and comprehensive plan for communicating with parents, including mechanisms for two-way communication

B3: Partner with families to support seamless transitions from ECCE programs to elementary schools

- **B3a:** Develop a statewide transition plan for children moving from ECCE programs to elementary schools

B4: Support economic security for families by connecting them with family strengthening services and resources

- **B4a:** Promote two-generation approach family strengthening services and resources such as Strengthening Families, Help Me Grow, Family Resource Centers, Home Visiting Programs, and Alabama Coordinated Health Network care coordinators

Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Workforce

GOAL: Build and retain a highly skilled and well-supported early care and education workforce

C1: Strengthen recruitment strategies and offer attractive benefits for ECCE professionals

- **C1a:** Develop a minimum salary scale for ECCE professionals based on education and experience
- **C1b:** Evaluate benefits for ECCE professionals such as a tax credit for teachers, loan forgiveness for Pre-K in public school systems and stipends
- **C1c:** Identify barriers for ECCE professionals entering the field

C2: Design and communicate clear pathways from education and training to high demand early care and education jobs

- **C2a:** Create a workforce and professional development registry to monitor educational attainment, professional development, CEUs, CLASS scores, retention and benefits
- **C2b:** Develop CEU requirements for ECCE professionals
- **C2c:** Increase number of high schools offering the Child Development Associate credential (CDA)

C3: Expand evidence-based and interdisciplinary professional development for early care and education professionals

- **C3a:** Assess professional development needs of ECCE workforce
- **C3b:** Expand ECCE professionals' access to early childhood coaches and mental health consultants
- **C3c:** Integrate employment and professional development skills into curriculum and training at multiple levels

Quality & Accountability

GOAL: Ensure all early care and education programs are of the highest quality; and maintain support for and accountability to rigorous standards

D1: Create, sustain, and expand high quality ECCE programs

- **D1a:** Provide subgrants to support high quality ECCE programs

D2: Address barriers and provide support for childcare centers pursuing licensure

- **D2a:** Evaluate utilization of Opportunity Zones to improve and renovate existing ECCE facilities
- **D2b:** Identify potential partners to assist with capital building resources for providers to meet physical structure/building requirements for licensure

D3: Increase provider participation in monitoring systems such as CLASS and STARS/QRIS

- **D3a:** Offer incentives, resources, and supports for provider participation and enrollment in STARS/QRIS

D4: Develop a coordinated and compatible data system to collect and connect existing data from multiple points and providers

- **D4a:** Create mutually beneficial data sharing agreements

D5: Engage in continuous quality improvement to support accountability and data-driven decision-making

- **D5a:** Use collective impact models to continue involvement of the State Advisory Council in guiding the ECCE systems work and in implementing the PDGB-5 systems strategic plan
- **D5b:** Promote ongoing research evaluation related to the ECCE system and family and child outcomes

D6: Collaboratively create unified early childhood standards of quality across state departments

- **D6a:** Revise the *Alabama Developmental Standards for Preschool Children* to reflect unified standards of quality across state departments

D7: Align early childhood policies and define legislative priorities across systems to support and promote building a strong educational foundation from birth to five

- **D7a:** Collectively with partner agencies, develop an annual early childhood legislative policy agenda

C. Timeline

The Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Strategic Plan spans 3-years: 2020-2022. During this time, the objectives will be planned, implemented or expanded upon, and evaluated. The pace of achieving each objective during the three years will vary depending on the finalization of the preliminary action steps under each objective. During this time, ADECE and the Steering Committee will measure progress towards meeting the objectives using its measurable indicators of progress outlined below, which will serve as a check and balance system to ensure the work is on track for completion at the end of three years.

D. Measurable Indicators of Progress

Measurable indicators of progress were not identified in the Needs Assessment Report but were established during the strategic planning process. These indicators are vital to the success of the strategic plan, as they will measure progress towards meeting each of the four goals. ADECE has identified data sources for each indicator that will be used to measure progress. These data sources vary from in-house sources ADECE manages to data sources from existing partners who will report the measurement of the indicator. Some will be monitored by new data sources created as part of the strategic plan. All indicators of progress will be assessed at regular intervals to ensure progress is advancing as anticipated. The specific measurable indicators of progress for each goal are outlined below:

Goal	Measurable Indicators of Progress
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Access & Affordability</u> Ensure high-quality early care and education services are accessible and affordable to all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to early care and education programs • Increased number of providers offering extended operating hours • Increased number of home-based care providers (private, Home Visiting, etc.) • Increased childcare subsidy amount • Increased number of families receiving childcare subsidies
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Family Partnerships & Support</u> Engage families as partners in early care and education; and provide access to comprehensive support services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of pediatricians participating in system efforts to disseminate information • Increased number of parents participating in the Alabama Parent Leadership Network • Increased number of programs reporting successful transitions for children from ECCE programs to elementary schools • Increased number of families utilizing two-generation approach family strengthening services and resources

<p><u>Well-Prepared, Well-Supported Workforce</u> Build and retain a highly skilled and well-supported early care and education workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of apprenticeship opportunities • Increased pay for ECCE professionals • Increased retention rates for ECCE professionals • Increased number of ECCE professionals participating in professional development activities
<p><u>Quality & Accountability</u> Ensure all early care and education programs are of the highest quality; and maintain support for and accountability to rigorous standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of licensed providers • Increased enrollment in CLASS and STARS/QRIS • Increased number of programs achieving STARS/QRIS • Increased number of high-quality ECCE programs • Increased number of ECCE birth to five partners participating in the development of the annual early childhood legislative policy agenda

E. Strategic Plan Alignment with Needs Assessment Domains

As outlined above, the development of the strategic plan was directly guided by the needs and outcomes identified in ADECE’s Needs Assessment Report. Below each finding detailed in the Needs Assessment Report is linked to specific objectives in the strategic plan to demonstrate alignment. As many of the needs identified overlap or are connected to more than one goal, some objectives are listed multiple times as they address more than one need. Needs assessment findings also overlap across required domains as well, therefore findings may be included under more than one domain.

Focal Populations

ADECE and the Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Steering Committee designed a robust stakeholder engagement process that included participants representative of all focal populations defined in the needs assessment: vulnerable, rural and underserved. Focus groups were assembled with an eye toward diverse representation of Alabama families from many backgrounds and who had experienced various types of childcare. This stakeholder engagement process ensured that families in these focal groups had an opportunity to directly share concerns and input toward the development of the strategic plan. The vision statement of the grant gives special consideration for “low income and disadvantaged children,” and the access and affordability goal of “ensuring high-quality early care and education services are accessible and affordable to all” demonstrates a commitment to all children in Alabama, especially those who may not be able to afford high-quality care without assistance and those who live in rural areas of the state where accessibility to high-quality care is a challenge. Additionally, the following objectives specifically align with meeting needs for these focal populations:

DOMAIN: Focal Populations	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable, Underserved and Rural Children (including children living in poverty, children experiencing abuse and neglect, children who are English Language Learners, children who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, children who have been diagnosed with a disability or developmental delay and children living in rural areas) • Early screening & detection • Care for children with developmental delays and special needs • Care for culturally diverse populations • Access to healthcare • Child protection system 	<p>A1: Create a sustainable funding system by broadening and blending diverse funding sources and innovative supports</p> <p>A3: Expand access and strengthen services to vulnerable populations</p> <p>B4: Support economic security for families by connecting them with family strengthening services and resources</p>

Quality and Availability

There were numerous findings and needs identified through the needs assessment related to quality improvements. ADECE developed the Quality and Accountability goal in response to the quality and availability needs outlined in the needs assessment report, which reads “Ensure all early care and education programs are of the highest quality; and maintain support for and accountability to rigorous standards.” Additionally, having a well-prepared and well-supported workforce, one of the four goals of the strategic plan, directly impacts the quality of ECCE programs for children, as does increased family inclusion and involvement, which is another goal of the plan (Family Partnerships and Support). Below are the many objectives in the plan designed to meet the needs related to quality:

DOMAIN: Quality	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth to Three Focus • Alabama STARS Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) • Licensing • Parent and caregiver inclusion and involvement • Challenges with ECCE profession • Regulations and policy to promote educational attainment • Training, education and professional development for ECCE educators 	<p>A2: Increase service capacity for children ages birth to five, with a focus on birth to three</p> <p>D1: Create, sustain, and expand high quality ECCE programs</p> <p>D2: Address barriers and provide support for childcare centers pursuing licensure</p> <p>D3: Increase provider participation in monitoring systems such as CLASS and STARS/QRIS accountability and data-driven decision-making</p> <p>D6: Collaboratively create unified early childhood standards of quality across state departments</p> <p>B1: Promote families as children’s first and most important teachers and advocates through increased family engagement</p> <p>B2: Increase family knowledge and choice about services and supports</p>

	<p>B3: Partner with families to support seamless transitions from ECCE programs to elementary schools</p> <p>B4: Support economic security for families by connecting them with family strengthening services and resources</p> <p>C1: Strengthen recruitment strategies and offer attractive benefits for ECCE professionals</p> <p>C2: Design and communicate clear pathways from education and training to high demand early care and education jobs</p> <p>C3: Expand evidence-based and interdisciplinary professional development for early care and education professionals</p>
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ADECE strongly believes increasing the availability of high quality ECCE programs in the state is essential to improving the short and long-term outcomes of young Alabama children. The first goal addresses availability: “Ensure high-quality early care and education services are accessible and affordable to all.” The following objectives address availability specifically:

DOMAIN: Availability	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of high quality ECCE programs • Access and transportation 	<p>A2: Increase service capacity for children ages birth to five, with a focus on birth to three</p> <p>A4: Offer families and providers comprehensive and clear information about programs and services to facilitate informed choices</p> <p>B4: Support economic security for families by connecting them with family strengthening services and resources</p>

Children Being Served and Awaiting Services

The needs assessment report identified challenges with accurately capturing the unduplicated number of children being served and unduplicated number of children awaiting services in Alabama. This is due in large part to the absence of a coordinated, consolidated data system. ADECE developed the following objectives to address this need:

DOMAIN: Children Being Served and Awaiting Service	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unduplicated number of children being served • Unduplicated number of children awaiting services 	<p>D4: Develop a coordinated and compatible data system to collect and connect existing data from multiple points and providers</p> <p>A5: Decrease length of waiting periods for children to access high quality ECCE programs</p>

Gaps in Data on Quality and Availability of Programming and Supports for Children and Families

As referenced in the previous domain, one of the biggest needs identified in the Needs Assessment Report is the lack of a coordinated, consolidated data system. Stakeholders widely reported a need for reliable data and that bringing agencies together to collect, store and share data was a critical step towards addressing gaps in the quality and availability of ECCE programming and supports. The below objectives from the strategic plan address this need:

DOMAIN: Gaps in data on quality and availability of programming and supports for children and families	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidated data system 	<p>D4: Develop a coordinated and compatible data system to collect and connect existing data from multiple points and providers</p> <p>D3: Increase provider participation in monitoring systems such as CLASS and STARS/QRIS</p> <p>D5: Engage in continuous quality improvement to support accountability and data-driven decision-making</p> <p>A2: Increase service capacity for children ages birth to five, with a focus on birth to three</p> <p>A5: Decrease length of waiting periods for children to access high quality ECCE programs</p>

Gaps in Data/Research to Support Collaboration in Programs/Services and Maximize Parental Choice

Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, parents and caregivers learned of programs and resources they would have been eligible for and would have benefited from using but were unaware existed. Strengthening communication with families was a key need identified to address this lack of awareness about resources and to maximize parental choice. The below objectives address these needs:

DOMAIN: Gaps in data/research to support collaboration in programs/services and maximize parental choice	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent and caregiver inclusion and involvement 	<p>A4: Offer families and providers comprehensive and clear information about programs and services to facilitate informed choices</p> <p>B1: Promote families as children’s first and most important teachers and advocates through increased family engagement</p> <p>B2: Increase family knowledge and choice about services and supports</p> <p>D6: Collaboratively create unified early childhood standards of quality across state departments</p>

Issues Involving Early Childhood Care and Education Facilities

ADECE’s Needs Assessment Report revealed that many ECCE programs face limits and challenges to be a high-quality facility because of their buildings and physical spaces. Many buildings cannot meet licensing requirements and need renovations or upgrades to become high-quality facilities designed to meet the needs of children birth to five. ADECE has designed the following objectives to meet this need:

DOMAIN: Issues Involving Early Childhood Care and Education Facilities	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buildings and physical structures 	<p>D1: Create, sustain, and expand high quality ECCE programs</p> <p>D2: Address barriers and provide support for childcare centers pursuing licensure</p>

Barriers to the Funding and Provision of High-Quality ECCE Services and Supports and Opportunities for More Efficient Use of Resources

Numerous challenges were identified in the Needs Assessment Report related to funding and affordability. Families in focus groups identified the high cost of childcare as a leading barrier to placing their children in high-quality childcare programs. Additionally, challenges related to ongoing funding sources as well as the distribution of funding were identified as needs from providers. Stakeholders want to see increased and sustained investments in early childhood care and education from supporters such as the business community and legislature to support state, federally funded and private ECCE programs.

DOMAIN: Barriers to the Funding and Provision of High-Quality ECCE Services and Supports and Opportunities for More Efficient Use of Resources	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost and affordability Funding for ECCE programs Challenges with distribution of funding Support from legislature, businesses and community Support for private ECCE facilities 	<p>A1: Create a sustainable funding system by broadening and blending diverse funding sources and innovative supports</p> <p>A2: Increase service capacity for children ages birth to five, with a focus on birth to three</p> <p>D1: Create, sustain, and expand high quality ECCE programs</p>

Transition Supports and Gaps

According to ADECE’s Needs Assessment Report, stakeholders widely acknowledged a lack of communication and challenging transitions between ECCE programs and K-12. Clear, supportive, and well-communicated pathways between ECCE programs to elementary school are desired to promote successful outcomes for children. ADECE has outlined the following objectives to address this need:

DOMAIN: Transition Supports and Gaps	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from ECCE to K-12 • Transition from Early Intervention to K-3 care • Parent and caregiver inclusion and involvement 	<p>A4: Offer families and providers comprehensive and clear information about programs and services to facilitate informed choices</p> <p>B2: Increase family knowledge and choice about services and supports</p> <p>B3: Partner with families to support seamless transitions from ECCE programs to elementary schools</p>

System Integration and Interagency Collaboration

Collaboration with partners across systems is the foundational principle undergirding the entire ADECE PDGB-5 strategic plan. ADECE recognizes its efforts will only be successful if it is engaged and coordinated with numerous partners from various backgrounds using an equity lens to improve the early childhood care and education landscape within Alabama. Several objectives were created in the strategic plan to address collaboration, including issues such as workforce, data systems, standards of quality and legislative priorities. Alignment and objectives for this need are outlined below:

DOMAIN: System Integration and Interagency Collaboration	
Needs Assessment Findings	Strategic Plan Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interagency Collaboration 	<p>C2: Design and communicate clear pathways from education and training to high demand early care and education jobs</p> <p>D4: Develop a coordinated and compatible data system to collect and connect existing data from multiple points and providers</p> <p>D6: Collaboratively create unified early childhood standards of quality across state departments</p> <p>D7: Align early childhood policies and define legislative priorities across systems to support and promote building a strong educational foundation from birth to five</p>

V. Governance

Alabama has an existing governance structure that promotes accountability, coordination, alignment, efficiency and sustainability. In 2000, the Alabama Legislature passed Alabama Code Title 26: Infants and Incompetents 26-24-1 for the creation of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (ADECE) with the duty of “preparing and submitting to the Governor and the Legislature annual reports on activities and expenditures of state and local agencies related to children; all state, local, and federal funding available for children’s programs other than education programs offered by the Department of Education for K-12; and recommendations of proposed legislation on the most efficient utilization of resources available in order to maximize services provided to children.” The duties of this office were expanded in 2016 to “develop a cohesive and comprehensive system of high-quality early learning and care.”

ADECE is the statutorily designated agency to administer and lead the State Children’s Policy Council (CPC). The Children’s Policy Council is designated by state law as a coordinating entity for children’s services to bring together agencies that impact children. The State CPC is designated as the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), meeting the requirements described in Section 642B(b) of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9837(b)). The re-formation of CPC/ECAC in 2015 has resulted in improved coordination, collaboration, and oversight of all services and programs for children in Alabama.

The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, with the guidance of the PDGB-5 Steering Committee, will be responsible for ensuring the work of the strategic plan is monitored and implemented, as well as assuring ongoing oversight of the mixed delivery system and meaningful engagement of stakeholders. The PDGB-5 Steering Committee includes a diverse group of state and local representatives of key partner organizations and agencies across the state and is a subset of the ECAC. The PDGB-5 Steering Committee has been involved in all aspects of the grant efforts, including extensive involvement in the design and oversight of the needs assessment and strategic planning processes. This group will continue to provide ongoing guidance and input as the strategic plan is implemented, including at least quarterly meetings to review and monitor progress on outcome indicators.

Federal, state and local statutory requirements were considered in the development of Alabama’s PDGB-5 strategic plan. At this time, no barriers are anticipated to impede successful implementation.

VI. Resources & Collaboration

ADECE has a strong history of success in obtaining federal and state funding to support comprehensive B-5 systems. In addition to receiving a previous Preschool Development Grant, the department is also the state lead for B-5 home visiting, including the federal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. The PDGB-5 systems work is aligned with Governor Kay Ivey’s strategic priorities and other state legislative activities. Through this strong working relationship with the Alabama Governor and state legislature, ADECE has consistently received adequate state funding to maintain and enhance the infrastructure needed to expand its programs while assuring high quality standards. ADECE is also applying for the federal PDGB-5 renewal grant for 2020-2022, and if awarded, would utilize funds for implementation of the strategic plan. Additional resources including leadership, funding, and collaborative staff expertise are available from outside ADECE through key partnerships with many organizations and agencies across the state. These include the Alabama State Department of Education; Alabama Medicaid; the Alabama Departments of Human Resources, Public Health, Rehabilitation Services (Early Intervention and Children’s Rehabilitation Service), Mental Health, and Child Abuse and Neglect; 2- and 4-year colleges and universities; Voices for Alabama’s Children; Alabama Partnership for Children; Alabama School Readiness Alliance; and other public and private partners. Additionally, ADECE has MOUs and data-sharing agreements with many key partner organizations and agencies across the state. These include the Alabama State Department of Education; Alabama Medicaid; the Alabama Departments of Human Resources, Public Health, Rehabilitation Services, Mental Health, and Child Abuse and Neglect; 2- and 4-year colleges and universities; Voices for Alabama’s Children; Alabama Partnership for Children; Alabama School Readiness Alliance; and other public and private partners. In addition to the formal agreements, ADECE has extensive informal agreements and working relationships in local communities as well.

These ongoing relationships offer opportunities to enhance B-5 systems development by working within guidelines of other funding sources and projects, such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant, the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, Alabama Project LAUNCH, Help Me Grow, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Alabama scholarships, and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds. Taken together, these relationships will support improved coordination and collaboration at all levels and will leverage existing resources to address the activities of the PDGB-5 strategic plan.

VII. Conclusion & Next Steps

In conclusion, ADECE is well positioned to successfully implement its strategic plan with guidance and oversight from the Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Steering Committee. Implementation will require continued coordination and collaboration with many dedicated partners across various systems in the state who are committed to reaching the plan’s vision and achieving its goals. Together, Alabama can improve its early care and education birth to five system to support all children and their families in the state.

VIII. Attachments

1. List of Steering Committee Members

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Steering Committee Membership		
#	Name	Organization
1	Jan Bell, Executive Director	Children’s Policy Council of Jefferson County
2	Jennifer Connell, Child Development Consultant	Alabama Department of Human Resources - Early Head Start Child Care Partnership
3	Barbara Cooper, Director of the Office of School Readiness	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education
4	Anthony Daniels, State Representative	Alabama House of Representatives; Premiere Dental
5	Jane Duer, Early Intervention Coordinator and Project Launch Director	Alabama Department of Mental Health
6	Chris Haag, Deputy Bureau Director	Alabama Department of Public Health – Title V Maternal and Child Health Program
7	Kathy Hall, Deputy Commissioner	Alabama Medicaid
8	Robin Mackey, Executive Director	Family Resource Centers
9	Margaret Morton, Executive Director	SAFE Family Services Center
10	Faye Nelson, Division Director	Alabama Department of Human Resources
11	Ernest Palmer, Program Director	Community Service Program of West Alabama, Inc.
12	Gail Piggott, Executive Director	Alabama Partnership for Children
13	Julie Preskitt, Assistant Professor	UAB School of Public Health
14	Betsy Prince, Coordinator	Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services- Alabama’s Early Intervention System
15	Jeana Ross, Secretary	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education
16	Tracye Strichik, Senior Director	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education
17	Stephen Woerner, Executive Director	VOICES for Alabama’s Children

2. List of Interview Participants

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education		
Interview Participants		
#	Interviewee Name and Role	Organization
1	Jeana Ross, Secretary	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE)
2	Tracye Strichik, Senior Director	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE)
3	Joy Winchester, Director	Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE)
4	Nancy Buckner, Commissioner	Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR)
5	Faye Nelson, Division Director	Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR)
6	Jennifer Connell, Child Development Consultant	Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR)
7	Lynn Beshear, Commissioner	Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH)
8	Kimberly Boswell, Chief of Staff	Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH)
9	Jane Elizabeth Burdeshaw, Commissioner	Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS)
10	Tammy Meyer, CRS District Supervisor	Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS)
11	Tonya Beech, Office Coordinator	Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS)
12	Kathy Hall, Deputy Commissioner	Alabama Medicaid (Medicaid)
13	Janice Smiley, Director	Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH)
14	Sallye Langshore, Director	Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (CANP)
15	Gay Fin, Education Administrator	Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)
16	Stephanie Frucci, Education Specialist	Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)
17	April Shrader, Education Specialist	Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)
18	Nick Moore, Education Policy Advisor and Coordinator	Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation
19	Terri Collins, Representative	Alabama House of Representatives
20	Anthony Daniels, Representative	Alabama House of Representatives
21	Greg Reed, Senator	Alabama Senate
22	Betsy Prince, Coordinator	Alabama Early Intervention Services (AEIS)
23	Dianna Tullier, First Teacher Home Visiting Manager	Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)
24	Allison Muhlenhoff, Executive Director	Alabama School Readiness Alliance (ASRA)
25	Sophia Harris, Founder and Retired Executive Director	Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama (FOCAL)
26	Cason Benton, Director	Alabama Child Health Improvement Alliance (ACHIA)
27	Lee Johnson III, Infant Family Associate	Alabama Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (First 5 Alabama)
28	Dallas Rabig, Endorsement Coordinator	Alabama Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (First 5 Alabama)
29	Gail Piggott, Executive Director	Alabama Partnership for Children (APC)
30	Tom Spencer, Senior Research Associate	Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA)
31	James Ernest, Researcher	University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)
32	Linda Champion, Project Coordinator	American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
33	Linda Lee, Executive Director	American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
34	Polly McClure, Statewide Coordinator	Reach Out and Read- Alabama
35	Molly Cagle, Vice President of Governmental Affairs	Business Council of Alabama
36	Melanie Bridgeforth, President & CEO	The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham
37	Madeline Blancher, Physician	Pediatrician
38	Marsha Raulerson, Physician	Pediatrician
39	Francis Rushton, Physician	Pediatrician

3. Provider Focus Groups

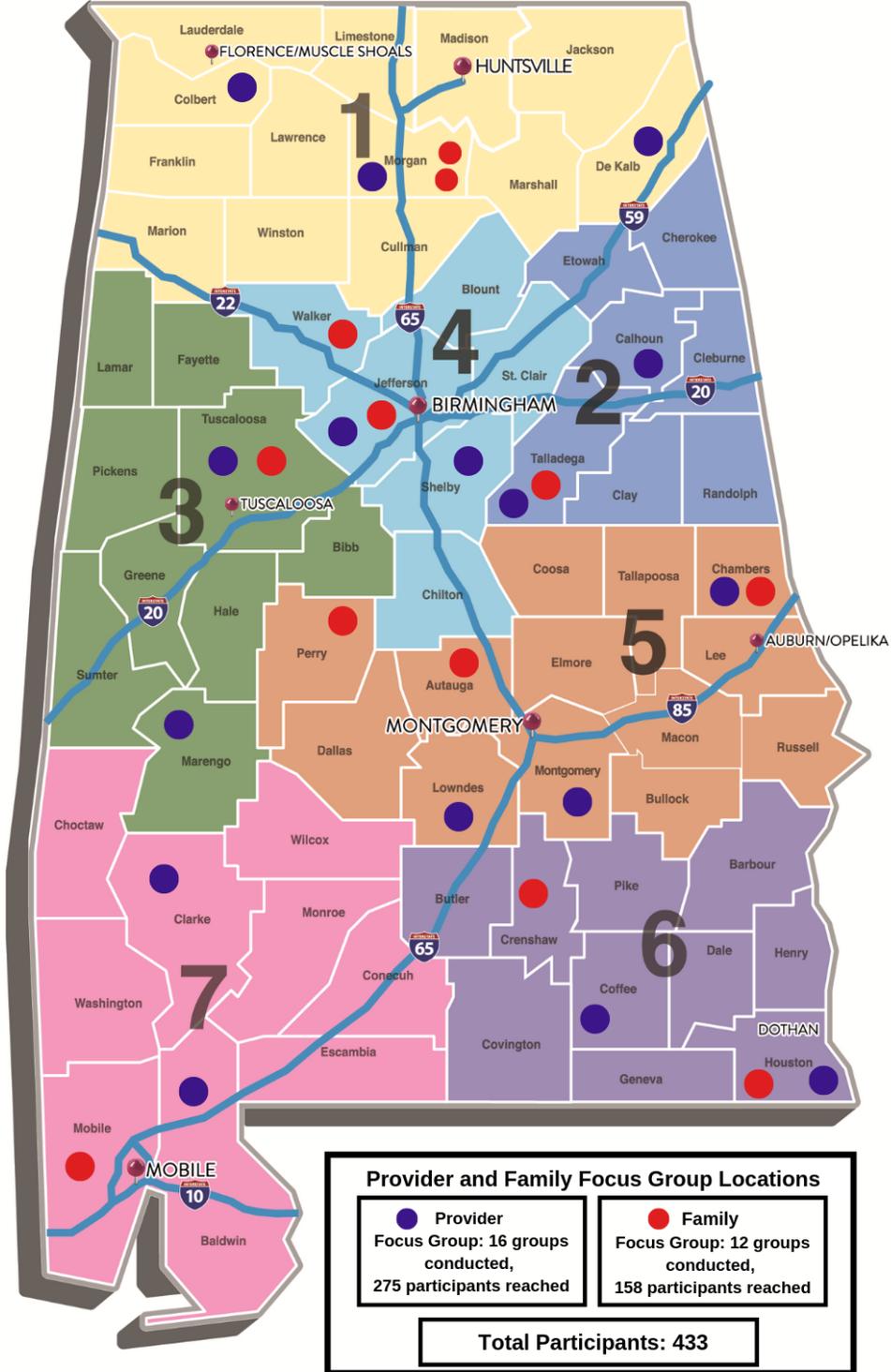
Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Provider Focus Groups		
# of Groups	Organization Name	Number of Participants
1	Alfred Saliba Family Service Center	12
2	Alfred Saliba Family Service Center	22
3	SAFE Family Services Center	35
4	Childcare Resources	20
5	Childcare Resources	19
6	Circle of Care Center for Families	16
7	Talladega Clay Randolph Child Care Corporation	15
8	Goodwill Industries Easter Seals of the Gulf Coast	12
9	Clarke County HIPPY	8
10	Childcare Resource Network	14
11	Community Action Partnership of North Alabama	11
12	Community Action Partnership of North Alabama	25
13	Child Development Resources	19
14	Child Development Resources	6
15	Family Guidance Center	28
16	Family Guidance Center	13
	Total:	275

4. Family Focus Groups

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Family Focus Groups		
# of Groups	Organization Name	Number of Participants
1	Tuscaloosa's One Place	13
2	SAFE Family Services Center	18
3	PACT: Parents and Children Together	13
4	PACT: Parents and Children Together	17
5	Circle of Care Center for Families	4
6	Y-Woodlawn, YWCA Central Alabama	7
7	Saliba Center for Families	17
8	Saliba Center for Families	14
9	Sowing Seeds of Hope	15
10	Family Support Center	8
11	Jasper Area Family Services Center	15
12	Goodwill Industries Easter Seals of the Gulf Coast	17
	Total:	158

5. Map of Focus Groups

Provider and Family Focus Group Locations



6. Strategic Planning Kickoff Meeting Agenda

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Birth to Five Systems Development Grant (PDG B-5) Activities 1 & 2: Needs Assessment & Strategic Planning		
Steering Committee Meeting August 20, 2019 10:00 am – 2:00 pm		
I.	Welcome, Introductions & Session Overview	ADECE, Julie Preskitt & Clarus
II.	Comprehensive Needs Assessment & Stakeholder Engagement Feedback	Clarus
III.	Review of Project Milestones & Timeline	Clarus
IV.	Break & Grab Lunch	
V.	Working Lunch: Review Definitions for Strategic Planning & Strategic Plan Guidance	Clarus
VI.	Review Strategic Goals	Clarus
VII.	Breakout Group Exercise: Develop Goal Statements	Clarus
VIII.	Next Steps & Closing	Clarus, ADECE & Julie Preskitt

7. Strategic Planning Session Agenda

Alabama Connections for Early Care and Education Birth to Five Systems Development Grant (PDG B-5) Activities 1 & 2: Needs Assessment & Strategic Planning	
Strategic Planning Work Session September 5, 2019 9:00 am – 3:00 pm	
I.	Welcome, Introductions & Agenda Overview
II.	Brief recap of Work to Date & Review of Goal Statements
III.	Develop Objectives
IV.	BREAK
V.	Develop Objectives, <i>Continued</i>
VI.	LUNCH
VII.	Table Sessions: Timeline Development for Objectives
VIII.	Develop Measurable Progress Indicators for each Goal
IX.	BREAK
X.	Coordination & Collaboration
XI.	Conclusion & Next Steps