

Kansas Department of

Social and Rehabilitation Services

Gary Daniels, Secretary

Legislative Educational Planning Committee
September 25, 2006

Kansas Early Learning Guidelines
Good Start, Grow Smart

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Chairwoman Kathe Decker and members of the Committee, I'm Alice Womack, Assistance Director for Capacity and Resource Development, for EES in SRS. In January 2002, federal education reform plans placed emphasis on reading, improved Head Start and improved early childhood. These initiatives, "No Child Left Behind" and "Good Start, Grow Smart" aimed to reach all children.

"No Child Left Behind" efforts address children K-12. The No Child Left Behind Act goal was to ensure that public schools are teaching students what they need to know to be successful in life. It also draws attention to the need to prepare children before they start school. What children learn before coming to school is vital to their success. The first five years of a child's life are a time of tremendous physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth.

The early childhood initiative "Good Start, Grow Smart" was developed to help strengthen early learning for young children. This will ensure that young children are equipped with the skills they will need to start school ready to learn. "Good Start, Grow Smart" complements the "No Child Left Behind" requirements.

Because a significant number of young children receive care outside the home, Federal and State governments provide more than \$18 billion annually to help families purchase non-parental care. Despite these significant resources, not all children are receiving high-quality care for several reasons:

1. Most states have limited alignment between what children are doing before they enter school and what is expected of them once they are in school;
2. Early childhood programs are seldom evaluated based on how they prepare children to succeed in school; and
3. There is not enough information for early childhood teachers, parents, grandparents, and child care providers on ways to prepare children to be successful in school.

Early childhood, deemed the period in a child's life from birth through age 5, is a critical time for children to develop the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills needed for the rest of their lives. Young children receive care in a wide variety of settings. Based on national statistics, 38 percent of children under the age of 5 receive care solely from their parents, and the remaining **62 percent** receive care through a variety of arrangements, including care by non-parental relatives, non-relatives, and center-based programs, including Head Start and Early Head Start.

The “ Good Start, Grow Smart” initiative addresses three major areas:

- **Strengthening Head Start:** Early literacy, language, and numeric skills. There will be a national training program to train the Head Start teachers in early literacy teaching techniques.
- **Partnering with States to Improve Early Childhood Education:** The development of criteria for measuring the quality of early childhood education, including state-developed guidelines on pre-reading and language skills activities aligned with State K-12 standards. These are the Kansas Early Learning Guidelines.
- **Providing Information to Teachers, Caregivers and Parents:** Partnerships as part of a broad public awareness campaign targeted toward parents, early childhood educators, child care providers, and other interested parties, and research to identify effective pre-reading, language curricula and teaching strategies. This will be the targeted audience for implementation and to disperse materials.

The Kansas response to both “ No Child Left Behind” and Good Start, Grow Smart” has resulted in the development and planned implementation of voluntary Early Learning Guidelines in Kansas. All three of the major areas noted above are addressed in these Early Learning Guidelines.

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) require states to include planning and development plans in their State Plan. Through the Child Care and Development Fund, a Federal-State partnership is created to link CCDF, State, and private efforts to promote early learning.

A variety of initiatives to improve the quality of child care are administered by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, the Kansas Department of Education, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Kansas Children's Cabinet, and close partners. Kansas is fortunate in that its partnering relationships to improve the quality of child care are legend compared to other states. So the development of the Early Learning Guidelines benefitted from the already existing strong partnership which met to design them.

Children enter the world with many needs in order to grow: love, nutrition, health, social and emotional security, and stimulation in the important skills that prepare them for school success. Children also enter the world with a great capacity to learn, which begins at birth. The Early Learning Guidelines help to standardize and promote early learning.