

A CASE STUDY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE

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Acknowledgements

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Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy

The Rennie Center's mission is to develop a public agenda that informs and promotes significant improvement of public education in Massachusetts. Our work is motivated by a vision of an education system that creates the opportunity to educate every child to be successful in life, citizenship, employment and life-long learning. Applying nonpartisan, independent research, journalism and civic engagement, the Rennie Center is creating a civil space to foster thoughtful public discourse to inform and shape effective policy. For more information about the Rennie Center and our current work, visit www.renniecenter.org, or call 617.354.0002.

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Strategies for Children, Inc., is a Boston-based 501(c)3 non profit organization, whose mission is to improve the well being of children and families by moving their issues to the top of the agendas of communities, states and the nation through public policy, advocacy, constituency building, and public awareness.

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A CASE STUDY OF THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 1, 2005, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to launch an independent department with a primary focus on early education and care. This innovative governance structure was created to have equal standing with the state's Department of Education (DOE) and Board of Higher Education (BHE). In Massachusetts and nationally, the new Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) was greeted with excitement, high expectations and a keen sense of watchfulness. The newly consolidated Department was given oversight of early education and care providers and after-school programs for children ages 0-14 (and through age 16 for children with special needs). EEC was expected to improve upon the previous governance structure and forge new ground in early education through the development of a system of universal, high-quality pre-kindergarten (UPK) for every three-, four-, and five-year-old child in the Commonwealth. The creation of the Department was viewed as an opportunity for Massachusetts "to lead the way in providing coordinated, cost-effective, high quality early education and care."ⁱ

The creation of the consolidated Department was the culmination of several years of work by advocates and policymakers and was influenced by a growing focus statewide and nationally on the importance of early education. The primary impetus for the creation of the Department was the interest in developing a system that ensured access to UPK through a mix of private and public providers, which the existing governance structure was not capable of overseeing. Several additional factors contributed to a heightened focus on the needs of young children. Brain research over the past decade has directed increased attention to early education as it showed the long-term impact of early education and its potential return on investment. Specifically, research has demonstrated that low-income children who benefit from a high-quality early education are more likely to excel in school, stay off welfare and out of jail, and to later become good parents themselves. Economic research also showed a potential return on investment in high-quality early education for low-income children could lead to as much as a 16% return on every dollar invested. A final factor included national growth in the number of women engaged in the workforce; a number which is projected to continue to grow.ⁱⁱ

This case study describes the evolution of EEC from its early conceptions to its impact over its first two and a half years. The goal is to provide a reference and resource for other state governments, advocacy groups and philanthropies seeking to develop a consolidated governance structure for early education and care. The case chronicles the purpose, history and evolution of EEC, articulates "lessons-learned" to date and identifies future opportunities and challenges for the agency as it strives to meet its statutory mandates.

Part I: Building Support for a New System

Prior to the creation of the independent, consolidated Department of Early Education and Care, the early education and care sector in Massachusetts was a labyrinth of separate bureaucracies and disconnected categorical programs. The two agencies that oversaw the bulk of the public funding for early education and care services were the DOE through its Early Learning Services Office and the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

The Rationale for the Department

There were several reasons for establishing a new, independent Department to oversee the Commonwealth's early education and care system:

1. The increasing movement toward high-quality UPK for all three-, four-, and five-year-olds to be delivered through a mix of public and private programs required the existence of a unified governance structure capable of setting consistent policies for high-quality programs and of efficiently managing funds.
2. The existing system was plagued with significant challenges that needed to be addressed, including confusion over funding sources, overlap in services provided, redundant and conflicting requirements for providers, and problems of access.
3. Findings from public meetings and interviews with a representative group of early education and care leaders and others from across the state convened by the Early Education for All Campaign (which is described in the full text of the case study on pages 11-17) made clear that the diverse field of early education and care providers, advocates and parents wanted the disjointed, multi-agency system fixed.
4. It was unrealistic to make the case for new funding for early education and care until there was a streamlined system in place.

Challenges to Establishing a New Structure

Despite the myriad problems with the existing structure and the clear need for improvement, there were significant challenges that stood in the way of the creation of a new, independent governance structure for early education and care. These included:

- The philosophies of education vs. care
- State vs. regional vs. local oversight
- Opposition from the Executive Office

Early Education for All Campaign

Through a series of one-on-one interviews and voter polls, child policy specialist Margaret Blood identified strong political will for increased public investment in high-quality early education for Massachusetts' three-through-five-year olds, and launched the Early Education for All (EEA) Campaign in the summer of 2000. EEA is an initiative of Strategies for Children, Inc., a 501(c)3 organization based in Boston, whose mission is to improve the well being of children and their families through public policy, advocacy, constituency building, and public awareness. EEA is comprised of a diverse coalition of leaders from business, early childhood, labor, religion, health care, education and philanthropy, working in partnership with families, grassroots leaders, and state policymakers to ensure:

- Voluntary, universally accessible, high-quality pre-kindergarten for every child delivered through a mix of public and private programs;

- Voluntary, universally accessible, high-quality full school-day public kindergarten for every child; and
- A statewide system to improve the training, education, and compensation of the early childhood workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ

Interviewees for this case study remarked that EEA was the driving force for the creation of the Department. They stated that EEA's most significant contribution was its ability to bring together the fragmented early education and care sector around common themes and convince a polarized field that it could achieve more through a unified voice, instead of several dissonant ones. EEA has pursued four strategies to build the support for universal, high-quality early education that were then leveraged for the creation of EEC:

1. Building a diverse coalition of support, including focused engagement of the members of the business and early education communities;
2. Providing the field and legislature with research and technical information;
3. Engaging directly with legislators and state policymakers; and
4. Utilizing the media to elevate the issue and galvanize public support.

Through its persistence in these core areas, EEA succeeded in gaining the support needed to influence the Legislature to enact language through the Fiscal Year 2005 (FY05) state budget creating the new, independent Board and consolidated Department of Early Education and Care.

Establishing the Department of Early Education and Care

In June of 2004, after four years of intense work by advocates and legislators, the Massachusetts Legislature unanimously passed and Governor Mitt Romney signed into law, as part of the FY05 state budget, *An Act Establishing the Department of Early Education and Care*.^{iv} Through the passage of the establishing language, the state's multiple early education and care programs from OCCS and DOE were consolidated into one streamlined independent agency of equal standing with DOE and BHE. The *Act* provided the Board and Department of Early Education and Care with statutory responsibility to oversee:

- The administration of a high-quality system of public and private early education and care;
- The development and implementation of a program of voluntary, universally accessible high-quality early education to all preschool-aged children in the Commonwealth;
- The development and management of an educationally sound kindergarten readiness assessment for preschool children and a comprehensive evaluation of early education and care programs; and
- The development and implementation of a workforce development system designed to support the education, training and compensation of the early education and care workforce.^v

Part II: The Department is Created

In an effort to ensure the thoughtful transition to and launch of the new Board and Department, the Legislature provided for a full year of planning before the new Department was to be operational. Under the law, which was passed in Chapter 205 of the Acts of 2004, the Legislature mandated that the nine-member EEC Board was to be appointed by

Governor Romney by March 1, 2005, and that the Board would have one month to appoint a Commissioner of Early Education and Care. In April of 2005, the Board unanimously voted to select Ann Reale, former senior policy advisor to Governor Romney, as its first commissioner.

The new Department was to be operational by July 1, 2005. Commissioner Reale assumed her responsibilities in mid-May of 2005 and began planning for the launch of the Department. Her first priority was to bring together two agencies with very different cultures and to facilitate the integration and physical move to one unified agency. Reale began by meeting with leaders of the departments and agencies that had previously provided early education and care and building a leadership team that could help guide the establishment and administration of the newly consolidated Department.

Immediately, the new EEC staff engaged in an intensive internal self-assessment period with the goal of developing a mission, guiding principals, priorities and a course of action for the Department. The new Board approved Guiding Principles by which to steer their decisions about EEC's priorities and future direction:

- Put children and families first.
- Be flexible and accountable.
- Balance access, affordability, quality and coordination/continuity of care.
- Prioritize the needs of low-income families.
- Build on the strengths of the current system; minimize weaknesses; maximize resources.
- Seek input from staff and stakeholders.
- Keep interested parties informed of progress.
- Provide timely and comprehensive information to the Board for decision-making.

The Department was responsible for providing information and support to families of the over one million children between birth and age 14 (and through age 16 for children with special needs) in Massachusetts. EEC is responsible for licensing, monitoring and supporting early education and care providers, and providing financial assistance for low-income children - funding approximately 54,000 slots in fiscal year 2006.^{vi}

The agency's funding comes from a total of 17 state, federal and other trust accounts. In FY06, the total budget was nearly \$500,000,000 with approximately 85% of that funding coming through federal appropriations or being used as a state match for federal appropriations.^{vii}

PART THREE: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

This case study is largely based on interviews from a diverse group of 43 leaders, representing public and private educators and program providers, legislators, other policymakers, business leaders, early education and care experts and other stakeholders. This section summarizes respondents' views of the strengths and challenges of the Department in its first two and a half years and explores the future challenges of the Department with the intent of providing information to guide EEC as it moves forward. What follows are the most commonly mentioned issues. Overall, the interview research

conducted for this report showed that the new Department of Early Education and Care is an improvement over the previous system and is making clear progress.

Interviewees' comments regarding progress and challenges fell into two categories:

1. Creating a stable foundation for a new structure, and
2. Developing a vision for a new and more effective system of delivery of early education and care for all children.

Creating a Stable Foundation for a New Structure

Many interviewees acknowledged the Department's progress in establishing a firm foundation for this new governance structure. In its first two and a half years, EEC has merged two substantial governmental agencies into one Department, secured new office space, and accomplished many other managerial and logistical tasks. Interviewees noted the following as some of the strengths of the first phase of making the newly consolidated Department operational:

- Building a strong infrastructure
- Promoting consistency
- Moving use of technology into the 21st century
- Consolidating the wait list
- Raising awareness of early education and care

In addition to significant progress in administrative and logistical functions, there have been challenges. Those most commonly mentioned included:

- Too slow - EEC did not move quickly enough to initiate programs and to get funds out to the early education and care field.
- Staffing capacity - EEC did not have adequate staff capacity, especially staff with early education and care experience, to carry out the vast array and amount of services for which it was responsible.

Developing a Vision for a New and More Effective System of Delivery of Early Education and Care for All Children

This section explores what many interviewees identified as the need for the Department to shift its focus beyond the mundane tasks of getting the Department up and running toward the development of a long-term vision for the implementation of radically improved early education and care services for Massachusetts children.

Leadership

Interviewees felt that the first component necessary for establishing a vision for the Department is leadership, encompassing the role of both the EEC board and the Commissioner.

- EEC Board - Several interviewees expressed uncertainty over the EEC board membership, which has had a significant amount of turnover. Interviewees were also concerned over the representation of the board, reporting that racially, geographically, and in terms of background, the board members did not adequately mirror the field that it was charged with representing.
- The Commissioner - Many in the early education and care field as well as DOE and OCCS were skeptical of the appointment of Commissioner Ann Reale. Yet, for all the

initial skepticism, when asked about the strengths of the newly consolidated Department, the majority of respondents cited the Commissioner's leadership.

Moving to the Next Level

Many respondents pointed to the need for the leadership of the Department to push beyond operational issues to focus on creating a high-functioning Department and system of early education and care for all children in the Commonwealth. The following were the most frequently noted comments about how the Department might move to the next level:

- Develop a long-range vision and plan
- Focus on raising the quality of programs
- Build a high-quality workforce
- Unite education and care
- Be a better advocate for funding and policy issues

LESSONS FOR OTHER STATES

Across the country, states are considering potential governance structures for elevating early education and care to assume equal status with K-12 and higher education. Many states are seeking to develop a cohesive and unified system of public schooling that spans from birth through graduate school. While the Department of Early Education and Care evolved in response to a context that was unique to Massachusetts, there are lessons that are applicable to others. Despite the challenges currently facing EEC as it moves from establishing a stable foundation to fulfilling its statutory mandates of its enabling language, it is clear that this new governance structure is viewed as a marked improvement over the previous structure. When asked whether EEC was better than the previous system, fully 77% of the diverse group of respondents interviewed for this study reported that the new Department was either better, or not worse.

Fully 77% of the diverse group of respondents interviewed for this study reported that the newly consolidated Department was either better, or not worse than the previous structure.

The following are some of the lessons for other states identified by interviewees:

- ***Identify strong Legislative and/or Executive Branch champions.*** The creation of the Department of Early Education and Care was dependent upon legislative support from powerful and influential champions. It is essential to have at least one high-ranking leader in state government make early education and care a priority.
- ***Use research to make the case.*** As was done in Massachusetts, research can be used to effectively build support and public awareness for the importance of high-quality early education. The distillation and dissemination of third-party research and relevant reports that make the case for the impact and long-term benefits of early education can be powerful ways to bolster support.
- ***Build a strong coalition of engaged stakeholders.*** The majority of those interviewees who made suggestions for other states cited the importance of having an "advocacy champion" to unite the field, bring needed attention to the issue and be persistent about getting changes made.

- **Analyze the current system's strengths and weaknesses.** Many interviewees expressed the view that any state interested in the creation of a new governance structure should first make sure to have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system so that they could build on what has been developed rather than starting from scratch. States should also make sure that enough planning time is built into the schedule for the new Department to ensure that a successful launch can be accomplished.
- **Make changes strategically, and based on data.** States should take the time to develop a new policy, practice, or procedure rather than doing away with an existing one outright and in the absence of something to replace it. Having good data to back up decisions to make changes is also critical to bolster support and buy-in for those changes. A strategic planning committee with sufficient timelines and deadlines can be helpful to facilitate the merger of multiple agencies into one. The scope of the committee's work can include analysis of the existing system and strategic planning for a new one. States should create a long-term vision that stretches several years into the future and outlines clear accomplishments along the way.
- **Communicate - often.** As stakeholders of the new Department venture into new territory, uncertainty and unease are to be expected. Regular communication from the leaders of the new agency can go a long way toward alleviating unrest and preventing misconceptions.
- **Advocate for resources.** Adequate resources are, without question, vital in ensuring that any new department has the capacity to be effective and fulfill its mandates. Those who lobby for a new department, as well as those who lead it, should be strong, savvy and tireless advocates for adequate and consistent resource allocation for the creation and sustainability of a new department.
- **Seek out opportunities to work with others.** No new department can accomplish everything on its own. States should be vigilant about engaging with other organizations or agencies that have similar goals.
- **Be patient - but persistent.** It goes without saying that starting a new agency from scratch is no small feat. While it is critical to hold fast to high expectations and the vision the new department was designed to realize, it is also important not to let expectations get too far ahead of what is feasible.

New Developments

New Governor

In January 2007, Deval Patrick was sworn in as Massachusetts' 71st Governor. A Democrat, Governor Patrick has identified high-quality early education as one of his top priorities, and has included high-quality UPK in his 10-year strategic plan for comprehensive education reform. This is the first time in recent history that a champion for young children's early education has led in the Executive Office.

New Board Appointments

In September 2007, Governor Patrick appointed two new members of the Board of EEC. Board Chair Sharon Scott-Chandler, the first chair who was not the Secretary or designee of the state's Executive Office of Health and Human Services, was the Vice President of Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), replacing former chair EOHHS

Secretary JudyAnn Bigby. The Governor also appointed Jondavid Chesloff, Deputy Director for the Massachusetts Business Roundtable, as the business representative.

In March 2008, two additional appointments were made to the Board. Dr. Chi-Cheng Huang, appointed to fill the Board's parent seat, was a professor with the Boston University School of Medicine. Carol Craig O'Brien, appointed to the teacher seat, was the Early Child Coordinator for a public school system south of Boston.

Education Governance Changes

In January 2008, Governor Patrick proposed the creation of an Executive Office of Education to be headed by a Secretary of Education that would oversee the Departments of Early Education and Care, Elementary and Secondary Education (formerly the Department of Education serving grades K-12), and Higher Education. The goal of this governance change was to ensure that all education sectors were on equal footing and to improve the coordination across all sectors to create a comprehensive, aligned and “seamless” educational system from pre-K through higher education.”^{viii} In March 2008, after the plan received legislative approval, Governor Patrick appointed Paul Reville as Secretary of Education, to oversee the newly created Executive Office of Education, which is scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2008. Reville, an expert in Massachusetts education policy, served as the chairman of the Board of Education and was a member of the EEA Campaign Advisory Committee.

Finally, during the editing process for this case study, Commissioner Ann Reale announced her resignation as Commissioner of the Department of EEC, effective March 28, 2008. On March 11th, the EEC Board of Directors unanimously voted to appoint Deputy Commissioner of Programs, Amy Kershaw, as Acting Commissioner, while the Board conducted a national search for a new commissioner.

Conclusion

Since the launch of EEC in Massachusetts, several other states have made similar governance changes to elevate early education, and more states are exploring governance structures that recognize its importance. As the first state in the nation to establish an independent Department of Early Education and Care, Massachusetts has forged a path for others to follow. While the Department has significant challenges to address, it has also made clear progress in its first two and a half years. After having laid the groundwork for a new and better system, Massachusetts stakeholders and policymakers are now eager for the Department to develop and implement an expansive vision for improving the quality of early education and care for all children in the Commonwealth.

ⁱ EEC board meeting presentation, September 6, 2005.

ⁱⁱ United States Department of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/dol/audience/aud-women.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ EEA web site, www.earlyeducationforall.org.

^{iv} The legislation was passed as Chapter 205 of the Acts of 2004.

^v Subsection 3 (a) of Section 1 of Chapter 205 in the Acts of 2004.

^{vi} EEC Board presentation.

^{vii} EEC Board presentation, September 6, 2005.

^{viii} The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Department press release, January 10, 2008.

Appendix A: List of Interviewees

Edward Augustus, Jr. - Massachusetts State Senator; Vice-Chair, Joint Committee on Education

Douglas Baird - Former President and CEO of Associated Early Care and Education; EEC Transition Team Member; Member, EEA Advisory and Policy Committee; President, Baird Associates

Vicki Bartolini - EEC Transition Team member; Chair and Associate Professor, Education Department, Wheaton College

Barbara Black - EEC Transition Team member; Early Childhood Coordinator, Northampton Public Schools; Member, EEA Policy Committee

David Bunker - Director of Special Projects, Committee on Ways & Means, Massachusetts House of Representatives

Elizabeth Caputo - Legislative Director, Office of State Senator Robert Antonioni, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Education

Jondavid (JD) Chesloff - EEC Board member; Deputy Director, Massachusetts Business Roundtable

Elizabeth Childs - EEC Board member; Former Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health

Julie Culhane - EEC Board member; Former Director of Early Childhood Programs for the Hampshire Regional School District

Leo Delaney - CEO, Memorial Ellis Children's Center

Melissa deSousa - EEC Transition Team member; Massachusetts Independent Child Care Association

Kathleen Devlin - Former Policy Director, Joint Committee on Education, Massachusetts State Legislature

David Driscoll - Former Commissioner, Department of Education

Marcia Farris - EEC Transition Team Member; Executive Director, Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children

Karen Frederick - EEC Transition Team Member; President, MA Association of Early Education and Care

Sally Fuller - Project Director, Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation

Kathy Gallo - Professional Development Coordinator, Lynn CPC, North Shore Community College

Patricia Haddad - Massachusetts State Representative; Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Education

Sue Halloran - EEC Transition Team Member; President, Massachusetts Child Care Resource & Referral Network

Kimberly Haskins - EEC Transition Team Member; Senior Program Officer, Barr Foundation; EEA Advisory Committee member

Sue Heilman - EEC Transition Team Member; Executive Director, Horizons for Homeless Children

Gwynn Hughes - EEC Transition Team Member; Executive Director, MA After-School Partnership

Sharon Lynn Kagan - Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy; Co-Director of the National Center for Children and Families; Associate Dean for Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University

Kathy Kelley - Former President, American Federation of Teachers - MA

Amy Kershaw - Acting Commissioner and former Deputy Commissioner for Programs, Department of Early Education and Care; Former Research and Policy Director, Strategies for Children, Inc.

Patricia Plummer - Chancellor, Massachusetts Board of Higher Education

Marilyn Mahoney - EEC Transition Team Member; Early Childhood Program Coordinator, Lynn Public Schools /CPC

Charlene Mara - Early Childhood Department Coordinator, Quinsigamond Community College

Tom Moreau - Former Research Director, Joint Committee on Education

Anne Mitchell - President, Early Childhood Policy Research; President, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Anne O'Driscoll - Former Associate House Counsel, House of Representatives, Massachusetts Legislature

Ann Reale - Former Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC)

James Robertson - EEC Transition Team Member; Plowshares Education Development Centers

Marta Rosa - EEC Transition Team Member; Director of Government Affairs, Wheelock College

Ben Russell - Former EEC Board Member, Principal, East Zone Early Learning Center, Boston Public Schools

Jason Sachs - EEC Transition Team Member; Director of Early Childhood Education, Boston Public Schools

Peg Sprague - EEC Transition Team Member; Vice President of Community Impact, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley

Marie St. Fleur - Vice-Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means; Massachusetts Legislature

Evelyn Tobin - Former Director of Public Policy, YMCAs of Massachusetts; Member, EEA Policy Committee

Paul Toner - EEC Transition Team Member; Vice-President, Massachusetts Teachers Association

Mary Walachy - EEC Transition Team Member; Executive Director, Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, Member, EEA Advisory Committee

Roy Walker - Child Care Bureau Regional Program Manager; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Ardith Wieworka - Former Commissioner, Office of Child Care Services; EEC Transition Team member; Vice President, Child Development Centers