

The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet: A Value-Add for Florida's Taxpayers, Children and Families

Across the country, there is growing agreement with the National Governor's Association that children's cabinets can "improve the state's economy and prospects for competition in the global marketplace by investing in the education and skills of children, the state's future workforce."

The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet is a relative newcomer among the 21 states with such cabinets or commissions. The Legislature created the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet in 2007 to:

Ensure that the public policy relating to children and youth is developed to promote interdepartmental collaboration and program implementation in order that services designed for children and youth are planned, managed and delivered in a holistic and integrated manner to improve the children's self-sufficiency, safety, economic stability, health and quality of life. (§402.56, FS)

Intent and Focus: The legislative charge recognized two important facts:

1. Services planned, managed and delivered in a holistic and integrated manner require focus on ensuring **better outcomes** for children and families served (i.e. higher yields for the state's investment).
2. Integrated services result in **more cost effective and efficient service delivery** to children and families, improved workforce productivity, less overlap and duplication of taxpayer funded services, and significant long term taxpayer savings for reduced special education, child welfare, juvenile justice, corrections, and many other "deep end" costs.

Successes: During its initial two/three years, the Cabinet focused on this charge. Its successes during these early, formative years have been recognized by the Forum for Youth Investment, a national organization with a mission of having all children in all states "Ready by 21." The Forum believes its partners, including Florida's Cabinet for Children and Youth, have demonstrated the ability to change the way states do business through coordinating services, developing a common set of outcomes, and collaboratively developing and implementing plans to foster the well-being of young people.

In the short time since its inception, the Florida Cabinet has progressed farther in these important areas than some older, more established cabinets. The Cabinet's progress is due to focusing work on accomplishment of four major objectives:

1. **Results based accountability for child well-being outcomes**
2. **Cross-agency teams**
3. **A children's budget**
4. **A data-sharing initiative**

Results based accountability (RBA) is a proven process of articulating shared goals, aligning work across multiple agencies and collecting and reviewing data to determine whether desired results have been achieved. The Cabinet engaged in RBA following adoption of *The State of Florida's Child*, a foundational report on child well being prepared by The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children on behalf of the Children's Summit Work Group. RBA has provided the context in which the Cabinet has addressed the four objectives.

To date, the Cabinet has:

- Adopted and provided **training** to state agencies on results based accountability.
- Adopted a **prioritized set of child well being indicators** to guide its work and that of partners and state agencies.
- **Selected four indicators from more than 70 it evaluated for initial focus** of strategies: 1) *Every Florida child is healthy* as measured by the headline indicator of children with health insurance; 2) *Every Florida child is ready to learn and succeed* as measured by the headline indicator of children whose kindergarten entry assessment scores show they are ready for school; 3) *Every Florida child has a stable and nurturing family* as measured by the headline indicator of child maltreatment (abuse and neglect); and 4) *Every Florida child lives in a safe and supportive community* as measured by the headline indicator of homeless children.
- **Deployed cross-agency teams** in each of these four areas. Their recommendations were presented to and adopted by the Cabinet. Two teams – child maltreatment and school readiness – developed **performance measures and cross-agency action plans** for agencies to programmatically reach goals related to the indicators and address gaps and inconsistencies in programs and services. The Cabinet adopted the action plan for child maltreatment prevention and has reviewed the action plan for kindergarten readiness which is pending adoption in the future.
- Developed and adopted strategies for financing an agenda to improve outcomes for children and families. A **children’s budget** has been researched and is being developed. The initial budget efforts cover funding for children (vs. other services), funding by agency, funding of programs, funding by cabinet outcome areas (i.e., health, stable and nurturing families, children ready to learn and succeed, and live in safe and supportive communities) with break out information for federal, state and local funding streams for the sitting cabinet agencies. It has been recommended that this be expanded to all state funds spent on youth. Moving forward, the Cabinet can examine and determine ways to redeploy resources and appropriately fund and change the ways programs and services work together for children and families.
- Designed a web-based, real-time **data and information sharing system** across multiple agencies, allowing Florida’s citizens to be served more effectively and efficiently. At this point, initial phases of the project are in place: the structure, data elements and user interfaces. The system is hosted and supported by the Northwest Regional Data Center. The sitting cabinet agencies contribute to the costs of support for this system, and membership of a cross-agency Children and Youth Cabinet Information Sharing System Committee has been identified to include the Chief Information Officers of all of the sitting agencies on the cabinet. The first phase includes setting up eight data sources, ten data exchanges, access for up to 1,000 users; and connecting the participating cabinet agencies’ data sources with the existing sources provided through the Judicial Inquiry System (JIS). The system is in a test environment and the draft users’ manual is being reviewed.
- Appointed a **State Advisory Council on Early Education and Care**, an advisory body to assist with cross-departmental strategies to better integrate services for children and families. With this designation, Florida received \$4.8 million from the reauthorized Head Start Act of 2001, effective September 2010 for three years. The Agency for Workforce Innovation serves as the fiscal agent and manages and monitors the grant.

The Cabinet, through its RBA process and other initiatives, has positioned Florida on the precipice of creating a system that minimizes duplication, enhances communication and coordination, and funds services that are proven to work in areas that will make the most difference – and have the most benefit – on Florida’s children and families and to Florida’s taxpayers.

However, the type of transformative change the Cabinet is facilitating does not come easy; bureaucracy and status quo are formidable opponents. As the Florida Legislature wisely foresaw, the Governor and state agency heads – not their lieutenants – are the only ones with the “juice” to force the change. It is only through their leadership and direction that the traditional approaches will be maintained, adapted, or jettisoned as appropriate to create a new way of work that for a new way of work focused on the above.

We urge you to make the Children and Youth Cabinet a priority and to support its extraordinary potential by maintaining the Legislative requirement that state agency heads – and not their designees – comprise its membership.

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The Policy Group for Florida’s Families and Children is an independent, non-partisan 501(c)(3) non-profit policy research organization composed of local and state leaders who are working together to enhance the well being of Florida’s families and children. For additional information about The Policy Group, this brief or other papers, please visit the website at www.policygroup.org, email policygroup@att.net or call 863-651-8445.