

Early Childhood Institute brings together expertise to strategize spending \$6 million in local communities

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Nov. 22, 2021)

Following a recent two-day institute on best practices in early childhood education, the state soon will award nearly \$6 million in grants to improve early childhood care and education in local communities throughout the commonwealth.

The Governor's Office of Early Childhood (GOEC) worked with local and regional agencies during the Early Childhood Institute (ECI) to develop strategic goal worksheets that will ensure every Kentucky child is ready for kindergarten. In order to support the implementation of these strategic goal worksheets, the GOEC will award nearly \$6 million from the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement to the collaborative agencies. These funds will assist the agencies with providing high-quality experiences for children from birth through 5 years old and their families.

Kentucky is primed to transform and amplify its work in recognizing and serving young children and their families and caregivers. Across the state, Kentucky communities are implementing innovative, effective strategies and services. GOEC wants to elevate those practices that deserve attention and provide assistance with scaling-up services to new communities across the state. The infusion of the additional funds will allow the collaborative agencies to expand proven strategies and provide long-term improvement in preparing children for kindergarten.

"Right now, about half of Kentucky's children are not ready to learn when they start kindergarten. That negatively affects their school experience and may set them up for failure or at least more difficulty learning throughout their school years and prevent them from having a successful career," said Gov. Andy Beshear. "The Early Childhood Institute is guiding discussions, presenting best practices and giving local councils what they need to develop a strong plan to get their children ready to learn on the first day of kindergarten."

During the institute, GOEC brought together a variety of national and state experts and organizations, including Dolly's Parton's Imagination Library, Kentucky Educational Television, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the Kentucky Department of Education, to support regional collaborative agencies by sharing information and tools.

"The Early Childhood Institute is critical to the foundation of Kentucky's children. The institute brings together community leaders, teachers, parents and government to ensure that every Kentucky child has the opportunity for success from cradle to career," said Mary Pat Regan, acting secretary of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet (EWDC), which houses the GOEC.

By bringing together people invested in early childhood to share what works and implementation strategies, the institute provides an opportunity for state, regional and local groups to work together in concert to make a long-term positive impact throughout the whole state.

“This year’s Early Childhood Institute was different in a very good way: It was about empowerment and action. Members of regional collaboratives had the dedicated time and space to explore promising evidence-based practices and explore incredible tools and their community’s data. The most powerful part for me was the opportunity for members to identify priorities and set goals that will spur immediate action when they return to their communities,” said Rina G. Gratz, executive director of Early Childhood Programs, Jefferson County Public Schools and an Early Childhood Advisory Council member.

Beginning this year, the GEOC institute is taking place throughout the year in smaller training sessions that focus on specific early childcare professionals and groups. It previously was held once a year.

“The new year-around hybrid (in-person/virtual) series of high-quality training provide opportunities for stakeholders to work together toward our goal for Kentucky to be the best place to start and to raise a family by developing plans to scale data-driven strategies that lead to a greater impact,” said Amy Neal, executive director of the GOEC.

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The Kentucky Governor’s Office of Early Childhood is the umbrella organization that unifies partners to overcome fragmented funding and programs with better alignment, coordination, efficiencies and concise messaging for more positive impact upon early childhood policy and practice. For more information, go to <https://kyecac.ky.gov/Pages/index.aspx>. GOEC is in the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet.

In Kentucky, 25% of the annual Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) funds are dedicated to early child care and education programs. In 2021, GOEC received \$1.4 million of the original MSA allotment, then received an additional \$5,994,686 because the 2021 receipts for tobacco products were higher than estimated.

Access Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) Early Childhood Profile [here](#) to learn more about the early childhood environment at the state and local level