

Roundtable on Children's Cabinets and Councils

Des Moines, Iowa

A MEETING REPORT

April 4-5, 2007

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE:

At the time of the Roundtable, there were 20 states with Children's Cabinets, councils or cross-agency coordinating bodies established to address the complex needs of children, youth and families. Since then, two new Governors have announced the creation of Children's Cabinets. Representatives from 11 states attended the Roundtable on April 4-5, 2007 to share their experiences, ideas and challenges. Several special guests, including the Governor of Iowa, Chet Culver, the First Lady of Iowa, Mari Culver and Patricia Kempthorne, the Former First Lady of Idaho, joined the event as well.

The Forum for Youth Investment (The Forum) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) are interested in strengthening and developing this emerging network of cabinet and council staff throughout the year. The goal is to develop a network that is not only supportive of state work, but will also emerge as a common voice that communicates the needs of state coordinating bodies to the federal level. In addition, the Forum, NGA and NCSL will be pulling together the best thinking on state level child and youth policy coordination into a Guide and the Roundtable was an opportunity to gather some rich stories from the field.

ATTENDEES:

Children's Cabinets and Councils

Debbie Benson, New York
Bart Bouse, Oklahoma
TJ Delahanty, Kentucky
Claire Dudley, New Mexico
Jason Dunn, Kentucky
Eva Lester, Arizona
Laura Beth Hebbler, Mississippi
Janice Hendryx, Oklahoma
Dick Pryor, Oklahoma
Amanda Singer, Utah
Lauren Sterling, Maine
Ann Bomstad Miller, Minnesota

Iowa Governor's Office:

Governor Chet Culver
First Lady Marie Culver
Sophia McGill

Former First Lady of Idaho:

Patricia Kempthorne

Iowa's Promise:

Beth Govoni

Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development:

Carol Behrer

Dick Moore

Steve Michael

Iowa Community Empowerment Board:

Shanell Wagler

The Forum for Youth Investment:

Elizabeth Gaines

Ada McMahon

Karen Pittman

Nalini Ravindranath

National Governors Association:

Susan Golonka

National Conference of State Legislatures:

Stephanie Walton

GOALS OF THE ROUNDTABLE:

The state officials who gathered in Des Moines used the Roundtable as an opportunity to meet with their peers and share ideas, receive assistance from those with the time to research and investigate solutions, and in some cases, help them get started. State leaders identified the following as key strategies and ideas that they wanted to take away from the Roundtable: strategies for forming and sustaining children's cabinets, creating formal connections with all the state government branches, strengthening the cabinets and executing sound strategies.

Additional topics of interest included the following:

How to align youth outcomes?

What are the common best practices of effective Children's Cabinets?

How do you effectively transition and sustain Children's Cabinets?

How do you create a children's budget and how do you disseminate and use it effectively?

What role can Children's Cabinets play in developing effective prevention strategies?

How can Children's Cabinets merge early childhood and youth development work?

How do you effectively build on an informal coordinating body to build a formal structure?

What are the best ways for Children's Cabinets to support and meet the needs of the governor?

How do you maximize the use of the Children's Cabinets' actual meeting time?

How do you expand the connections of the Children's Cabinet beyond the executive branch?

What are the implications of the Federal Youth Coordination Act for state coordinating bodies?

**LUNCH WITH GOVERNOR CHET
CULVER AND FIRST LADY MARI
CULVER:**

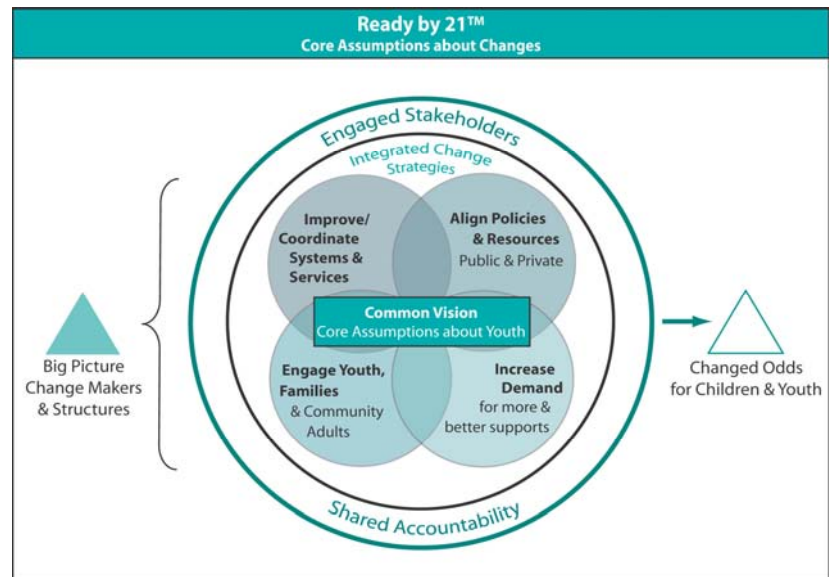
Iowa's Governor Chet Culver recognized that Iowa did not have a formal coordinating body, but was interested in working with the stakeholders present at the Roundtable to establish a structure in Iowa. The Governor reiterated his commitment to children's issues, particularly coordination of policy and plans.

First Lady Mari Culver highlighted her work with children in need of emergency shelter services. Despite the great bounty of programs and resources, many children in Iowa required shelter services because of a lack of emergency foster parents. As a way to address this issue, the Governor and the First Lady surveyed children in emergency shelters and directors of the shelters to gauge their need. The First Lady shared some of the survey responses with the Roundtable participants.

Following the remarks, representatives from Oklahoma, New Mexico, Maine and Arizona shared information about their own coordinating bodies and fielded questions from the Governor.

CREATING A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE CABINET OR COUNCIL:

Karen Pittman, Executive Director of the Forum for Youth Investment, facilitated a conversation on defining the key elements of success for a Children's Cabinet or Council. She opened the conversation by laying out the goals of the Forum. In a forthcoming paper on coordinating bodies, the Forum will capture the range of coordinating bodies that exist and discuss not just why Children's Cabinets are a good idea but how to create and sustain an effective one. These bodies have existed for several years (some for many years) and the Forum is ready to move from cataloguing their work and their examples to analyzing the effectiveness and the particular structure types, strategies and stakeholders that are essential for their success. Specifically, the analysis will focus on how Children's Cabinets affect the way leaders do business, the community supports that are in place for children and youth and the outcomes for youth. In addition, the Forum has identified four key areas that effective Cabinets and Councils must focus on in order to affect change. The areas include improving systems and services, aligning policies and resources, increasing demand, and engaging youth, families and communities.



Representatives discussed how the Children's Cabinets' priorities and work fit into the four key principle areas of the Ready by 21 model:

Improving Systems and Services:

- Moving quality of services beyond minimum standards to defining the standards
- Training and Technical Assistance

Aligning Policies and Resources (Public and Private)

- Establishing a common framework and setting priorities
- Identifying gaps and duplications

Engaging Youth, Families and Community Adults

- Creating formal structures to engage youth, families and adults (e.g. Maine's Youth Council, Iowa Community Empowerment Board)

SPOTLIGHT ON IOWA: EARLY CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS

In the past few years, Iowa has steadily moved towards integrating early child and youth development work together. The non-statutory and voluntary body guiding this process is a combination of the Community Empowerment Board, which focuses on early childhood, and the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development. In addition to integrating the two main organizations, the collaboration also includes Iowa's Promise and the State of Iowa Youth Action Committee, which functions as a youth council in Iowa. Although participation in the collaboration is voluntary, the body has a relationship to the ten state departments. It also functions as the steering committee and maintains a state agency work group. The collaboration works together to align policies, build capacity, provide youth a voice and mobilize Iowans. Although it is a non-statutory entity with volunteer participation, the body has leveraged \$5 million dollars for building a state and community youth development infrastructure.

Increasing Demand for More and Better Supports. In addition to discussion about the first three principle areas, representatives also spent a considerable amount of time brainstorming ideas about demands for supports. The discussion indicated that the two key stakeholders that are key to increasing demand for supports are local communities and legislators. Engaging them creates awareness of programs and services, which in turn increases support. Building demand is not just for increasing the support for programs but rather building awareness for action on several levels including the executive, legislative and community levels. Although many legislators are not official members of Children's Cabinets, their support through legislation and joint appearances is important because the legislative branch has a greater capacity for maintaining institutional memories than the executive branch because of the possibility of constant turnover. Legislative relationships also contribute to the ability of Children's Cabinets to sustain themselves beyond the term of the executive branch.

In addition to engaging the community and legislative branches, Children's Cabinet staff should also be vigilant about creating opportunities to increase demand for support. Mid-level staff can be charged with investigating gaps in current policy, delivery, or existence of services and create solutions which then engages the senior level staff and the community.

Change Structure. In order for Children's Cabinets to engage in the four key principle areas, they must first consider the change makers and structure involved (as seen in the blue triangle of the referenced diagram). In her discussion of the different structures of Children's Cabinets, Elizabeth Gaines identified five key factors that are important to determining the most suitable structure, which include where the structure is housed (increases reliability if housed in the right place), legitimacy (legislation or authority to make decisions), neutrality, leadership, and capacity. The type of structure may have an impact on the effectiveness of the Cabinet.

In considering various structures and elements of an effective Children's Cabinet, it is important to consider the role of informal members who work closely with the official members of the cabinet and perform integral work in between the cabinet sessions. The role of business partners is also an important consideration for the structure of Children's Cabinets. Although three states have included business partners as formal members, the vast majority of states engage business in other boards that present to the Children's Cabinets occasionally. Unlike the early childhood movement, business engagement in youth issues has been lagging. Businesses have been great partners with the early childhood movement, but a strong communication strategy needs to be utilized to not only engage youth early, but sustain that engagement throughout.

Despite the strategy of engagement and formal membership, a successful structure should engage a broad level of stakeholders to ensure they are represented and that sound communication strategy will engage them in the process.

Building and Sustaining Support and Credibility. Building support and credibility can be achieved through several strategies. Governors can be engaged in the process if the Children’s Cabinet initiated tasks in one of the interest areas of the Governor. Another strategy is to highlight the capability of the Children’s Cabinets to save and maximize state funds by coordinating policies and services, as well as leveraging resources, which is achieved by eliminating the duplication of services rather than ending programs or terminating employees.

Although the Cabinet could engage in issue areas and services, it is important to maintain a clear distinction between the function of the Children’s Cabinet and the various departments. If a clear distinction is not maintained, then the Cabinet may be interpreted as a weak entity and might be disbanded, as in the case of West Virginia.

TRACKING CHILD AND YOUTH OUTCOMES TO DRIVE CHANGE:

Child and youth outcomes are powerful tools to drive change. However, it is important to understand and distinguish the difference between indicators and performance measures. One of the ways in which Cabinets have been able to achieve this understanding is by tracking by age, developmental area and whether the prevention or treatment is positive or negative reinforcement based. The Forum has been instrumental in organizing the various indicators and performance measures of Maine and Georgia.

One of the ways in which integration at the structure, strategies and connections level can be achieved is by establishing common outcomes across departments, which alleviates competing demands and helps build a common vision and a common accountability system. In this capacity, Maine’s Children’s Cabinet functions as a conduit between the public, advocates and the executive branch. If Children’s Cabinets serve as a conduit, how accountable should they be and what level of expectation would be realistic? Furthermore, if Children’s Cabinets are going to be more accountable, then they need to support increasing demand not just through advocacy but through communications and building support.

BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN EDUCATION POLICY AND OTHER YOUTH POLICY:

Although education departments and their heads are vital for improving youth outcomes, it is often hard to engage them. Their strategic role in the governor’s offices and the cabinet allows Children’s Cabinets to utilize them in policy coordination. Meeting participants indicated that several states have the governor’s education policy advisor and/or the education commissioner as formal or informal members of the cabinet. Education secretaries are official members in all states that have established a Children’s Cabinets or Councils. The discussion generated several strategies for engaging education secretaries, including coordinating on a project that benefits the education department and connecting councils such as P20, which focus on aligning curricula to the Children’s Cabinet.

Important Takeaways from Past Roundtables

- Having a solid framework to guide you
- Grounded and connected to local communities
- Housed in a Governor’s Office but with Legislative input
- Leadership is on par with Structure
- Communicate Raison D’etre

Added this Year

Flexibility
Simplicity

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

Developing a Children's Budget. During this discussion, the New Mexico representative presented on the process New Mexico engaged in to create a children's budget. The New Mexico Children's Cabinet, recognizing its limitations in collecting and processing data, collaborated with the Office of Educational Accountability to establish it as the home for data. During a brainstorm session of a Children's Cabinet work group, the Cabinet identified all departments and programs that come in contact with children and youth. They also created a template with common categories for reporting the data and sent it to the identified departments and programs. The Cabinet discovered that the education department represented the lowest challenge to the data collection process because the department collected vast amounts of data. On the other hand, human services agencies represented the greatest challenge because they required several fact-checking iterations. Although New Mexico created a successful budget and has evidence legislators reference it, the Children's Cabinet continues to struggle on how to disseminate and the best way to utilize it.

The participants appreciated New Mexico's collaboration with the education departments to create the budget, which further reiterated the importance of the role of education in the work of the cabinets and councils. The collaboration also extended the role of the department of education beyond academics.

Creative Financing and Leveraging. During this break-out session, Lauren Sterling from Maine's Children's Cabinet and Mary Nelson and Denise Hoptop from the Iowa De-categorization program presented information on creative financing and leveraging investment dollars.

In Iowa, the juvenile court system uses creative financing to reduce the number of youth placed in out-of-state facilities. The program is voluntary, but 98 of the 99 counties participate in the program. The program is housed in the Iowa Child Welfare Agency and coordinates with local counties to deliver services while financing the system in creative ways. The program receives a state appropriation of 3 million dollars and 1 million dollars of federal money allocated for juvenile justice planning. Each county develops a separate plan, but draw money from a common de-categorization pool, which ensures that all counties have access to equal resources.

In Maine, creative financing also takes the form of pooling resources between five departments (Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections). At the beginning of each budget cycle, each department earmarks money for cross-cutting initiatives which totals \$300,000. The Children's Cabinet distributes the funds to local entities, who determine the services the communities will receive. In addition, the Cabinet also leverages \$5 million by filling gaps in the form of a one-time family in need assistance. An example would be a child who has to utilize a wheelchair. Medicare would cover the cost of the chair, but not the ramp. The Cabinet works with local structures to identify needs such as these and provide a one-time grant, which is further matched by in-

Considering State to Federal Alignment Challenges:

The Federal Youth Coordination Act came out of the recommendations from the White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth to create a coordinating council at the federal level. The legislation passed in November of 2006 and is awaiting funding. The allotted budget for the council is 1 million dollars, which is a small amount in comparison to similar acts, such as the Younger American Act. As part of a national coalition championing the Youth Coordination Act, the Forum is working to ensure that state leaders like Children's Cabinet staff are an integral part of the council. As part of this effort, we were successful in obtaining 13 letters from Children's Cabinet chairs, which were forwarded to the President's Chief of Staff, Secretary of Health and Human Services and others.

Another part of the effort to make youth a priority in the federal/national agenda is the Youth Policy Action Center (www.youthpolicyactioncenter.org), which is a website where organizations can post action alerts on state and federal policy issues, and have people contact their elected officials or media with messages. The website is a great tool for building demand for strengthening the voice of child and youth advocates by bringing them together in one space.

Finally, joint youth surveys are also on the federal/national agenda. Currently, there are too many surveys that are being required at the federal, state, and research levels. It is a hindrance on schools and youth. Discussion arose on the federal government's resistance to change the language of surveys and state agencies wanting to focus on particular issues.

kind contributions. Finally, the Cabinet leverages money through a fidelity wrap around program. Although the cabinet invested 4.9 million dollars initially, the state saves money because of the reduction in the number of children in residential care.

Strategies for Addressing Child Poverty. Representatives who participated in the child poverty discussion brainstormed several ways of reducing child poverty. These strategies included requiring a multi-level systems approach and layering to addressing poverty. In addition to promoting the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit and other child credits, states could create or expand a tax credit system as well. The group brainstormed ways to reduce TANF barriers for obtaining short-term skills building and training, as well as reducing high school drop-out rates. The discussion also explored ways to create a funding assistance system that provides resources for a one-time need. Participants acknowledged that addressing youth poverty requires different strategies.

Improving the Quality of the Workforce for Children and Youth.

This small group discussion focused on improving the quality of the workforce for children and youth. The discussion started with an overview of the Next Generation Coalition, which is an umbrella organization of different sectors in the youth field that are committed to improving and addressing workforce issues. Participants discussed state efforts to improve the workforce through tuition reimbursement and grant programs that encourage and support higher education, including the attainment of a four-year degree in a child or youth-related field. Representatives from Iowa discussed their efforts to expand the early childhood degree program to include youth workers. Another strategy was to establish a career lattice to promote workers' skills and leadership development and provide quality professional development and training. The group heard from the Oklahoma Children's Cabinet and their efforts to support and improve quality in the workforce through higher salaries and professional development. The group also tackled whether it was possible and legitimate for Children's Cabinets to champion quality in the workforce.

CHILDREN'S CABINETS AND COUNCILS NETWORK FUTURE ACTIVITIES:

As the Roundtable of Children's Cabinets and Councils have grown, the Forum for Youth Investment has prioritized the development of a Children's Cabinet and Councils network. Several states indicated they needed support in the areas of high school reform and after-school. There was a consensus in the research arena for better and more concise information on adolescent brain research development and ways in which the research can affect policy implementation. Participants also strategized ways in which current research on youth development and policy issues could be disseminated within the network and within their respective cabinets and councils. The discussion also included future steps that would ensure a connection between all the network members, such as a website or e-mail listserv.