

Tennessee Governor's Children's Cabinet

Logistics

Name of Coordinating Body: Tennessee Governor's Children's Cabinet

Administrative Home: Office of the Governor and Office of the First Lady

Staffing: The Governor's Children's Cabinet is supported by one full time employee, who serves as lead staff for the Cabinet.

Funding: Member agencies dedicate staff time and discretionary funds for specific projects, as appropriate.

Membership:

Tennessee's Governor and First Lady co-chair the Cabinet. Other members include commissioners from the following state departments:

- Department of Children's Services
- Department of Education
- Department of Health
- Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Department of Human Services
- TennCare (Medicaid managed care program)

Structure

- The Cabinet itself is made up of commissioners from six state departments and is co-chaired by the governor and first lady and meets approximately quarterly.
- The Cabinet is currently focusing on three priority projects:
 - Multiple Agency Collaboration with Individual Families (MAC)
 - kidcentraltn.com
 - Childhood Obesity
- Each of the Cabinet's three priority projects is managed by a steering committee consisting of cross-departmental employees designated by Cabinet members.
- Steering committees meet monthly or quarterly, depending on the needs of the project.

History

Year & Method of Establishment: The current iteration of the Tennessee Children's Cabinet was established in January 2012 by Executive Order No. 10, which replaced Executive Order No. 7, from the previous administration. The approach of the current Cabinet is for department leaders to set priorities and then align resources to support them. The Children's Cabinet under the previous administration had a different structure. The previous administration also included a Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination, which was a coordinating body and a grant-seeking and grant-making entity.

Duties/Responsibilities/Goals:

The Children's Cabinet is charged with coordinating, streamlining and enhancing the state's efforts to provide needed resources and services to Tennessee's children. In performing its work, the Cabinet focuses on a broad range of issues, including but not limited to children's physical and mental health, education, safety and overall well-being.

Priority Projects/Initiatives

- **Multiple Agency Collaboration with Individual Families.** The Cabinet is in the process of developing a cross-agency coordination pilot program, which will begin in four counties to develop a single team/single plan approach to serving individual families. The goal is for the four initial sites to result in recommendations that can be scaled-up statewide.
- **kidcentraltn.com** is managed by the Cabinet and serves as the state's one-stop shop for families to connect with important state information and resources. The site pulls and organizes content from across state departments, making it easier for families to find what they need. In addition to articles about health, education, development and support, kidcentraltn.com features a comprehensive directory of state-operated and state-funded services for children and families.

- **Childhood Obesity.** All six of the Cabinet's member departments are also focusing on childhood obesity and policies shaping the environments where children spend significant time. To maximize the impact and efficiency of this initiative, the Cabinet has also partnered with the Governor's Foundation for Health and Wellness to raise awareness of this issue. Their Healthier Tennessee and Small Starts Program provide tools that Tennesseans can use to build habits for healthy eating and increased physical activity.

Accomplishments

In 2012, the Governor's Children's Cabinet strategically chose to use Early Childhood Advisory Council funds for activities that align with the long-term vision of the Cabinet. They also maximized the impact of these one-time funds by connecting with a vast network of stakeholders and creating tools that empower those stakeholders to support school readiness.

The Tennessee School Readiness Model emphasizes that the state's children will be ready to succeed in school only when families, communities and schools work together on their behalf throughout the early childhood years. The document provides specific guidance for what communities, schools and families can do to support learning and development, but does not describe all possible examples. Further, the model provides indicators of what "ready children" know and are able to do across the birth-5 age span, but does not detail nor overemphasize them. For "readiness" is not seen solely as a condition within a child, but is a condition that exists when communities, schools and families collectively create a nurturing environment for child development starting at birth.

By providing the *Kindergarten Here We Come* DVD to colleges and universities for their early education programs and by providing it to pre-k advisory councils and continuing education networks, this Cabinet product will shape approaches toward preschool/kindergarten transitions for years to come.

A statewide needs assessment was deliberately shaped under the precise direction of the Children's Cabinet. Because members of the Children's Cabinet are the state's leaders and decisionmakers, it was important for them to select the needs data most relevant to them. The needs assessment data will support future strategic decisions and priority setting.

The Cabinet's STAR principles of engagement will be rolled out to all state departments in alignment with the customer-focused government initiative. The principles are as follows: *We engage customers from a Strengths perspective—ours and theirs. Our service is Transformational, not transactional, and reflects shared Accountability and Responsibility.* The Tennessee Department of Human Resources is in the process of developing a training module and will manage roll out of the STAR principles, while the Children's Cabinet will take a lead role in piloting the principles.

Contact Information

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Words of Wisdom: "In Tennessee our Governor, First Lady, and Children's Cabinet Commissioners set the priorities for Children's Cabinet projects. The Children's Cabinet itself maintains a lean staff structure so the work remains integrated within the departments. This approach promotes long-term sustainability for the projects and greater department ownership."

Links

- [Executive Order No. 10](#)
- [ECAC Grant Report](#)
- Kindergarten Here We Come: <http://www.tecta.info/tecta-services/kindergarten-here-we-come/>
- School Readiness model: <http://www.kidcentraltn.com/article/tennessee-s-school-readiness-model>