

MEMO

To: Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet

From: Elizabeth Gaines and Emily Jensen

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RE: Keep the Connections - Assessment and Recommendations

The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet has much to be proud of in the short time that it has existed. In 2007, a thoughtful piece of legislation became law that took into account the years of experiences of other state children's cabinets to improve outcomes for Florida's children and youth. Facing an upcoming transition you once again are engaging in a thoughtful self assessment and seeking input from a wide range of stakeholders. This is how public policy should always develop!

This memo will outline a few key items for your team:

1. a top line summary of the information gathering that we have done through the assessment, the online surveys, and the key informant interviews;
2. our recommendations based on that information and next steps or considerations for moving forward;
3. and the raw information gathered through the assessment, surveys and interviews in an appendices.

We look forward to an exciting site visit and the ongoing strengthening of the work of Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet.

SUMMARY

- **Structure:** Your structure is sound; there are only minor tweaks that may be helpful in getting better leader participation and better local support. Dedicated, funded staff is huge for sustainability purposes.
- **Goals:** Your goals could use some clarity and refinement; there are a lot of important commitments made in the strategic plan but there is some mixing of apples and oranges.

- **Partnerships:** In the area of partnerships there is a real opportunity for the next administration to engage some new stakeholders in the work – youth, business, private funders, local children's cabinets. Now is a great time to do it, you want to have friends in all places.
- **Data:** Great progress has been made on data collection and use there is an opportunity to be the first children's cabinet in the country to begin with basic point of service data use and then thoughtfully and systematically move to aggregate decision making through integrated data.
- **Strategies:** Many stakeholders reflected that because the cabinet is so new they have not seen the impact yet in their day to day work. A focus on bold strategies that show impact in aligning policies and resources, improving the quality of programs and services and really raising the bar on the importance of children and youth in this next administration will be key.

COORDINATING BODY STRUCTURE

Forum recommendations:

Membership and Meetings:

There is great strength in the membership on paper, all of the right agencies are included, the role of legislators in an ex-officio capacity seems strategic, and the judiciary role is important (and often forgotten in other states). From the interviews and surveys it seems the participation of agency heads is as one survey respondent said "sometimes woeful." Strong encouragement from the Governor can often make the difference in getting the cabinet members to participate. Occasional surprise visits from the Governor can't hurt either!

Another concern raised by a number of stakeholders was the ways in which advocates are engaged at the cabinet table. Though the role of advocates is necessary for raising hard questions and pushing issues forward, their participation in the cabinet meetings may hinder the ability of state agency heads to speak freely and openly about tough issues. The cabinet should find a structure that creates the best balance of agency heads' time, between working amongst themselves to solve interagency issues and also seeking input from advocates.

You may want to also discuss the possibility of using technology to enable the participation of those who must travel long distances to participate.

Authority:

The leadership and authority of the Lt. Governor is excellent, and should continue until a new Governor appoints a new chair. The weekly briefing of the Lt. Governor and his chief of staff outside of cabinet meetings has kept him very engaged in the work. This is evidenced by the way that the Lt. Governor was able to shepherd the data sharing project through with the resources needed to make it a reality.

It is crucial that the cabinet be on the radar of the incoming Governor early and often and in a way that signals his/her support in making it effective. Cabinet stakeholders should provide a solid presentation to the incoming Governor about the results and how he/she can use them to hold the agency heads collectively accountable. This is a great way for a new Governor to make their interactions with staff more streamlined, efficient and effective. Children's cabinet staff should not only provide the Governor with the annual report but provide regular briefings or updates on

the cabinet to the Governor on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The new governor should name someone to chair the cabinet with experience, authority and neutrality.

Resources:

The cabinet clearly suffers from a lack of full time appointed staff. I will not say 'dedicated' staff because the staff that has been filling the roles received very high marks on dedication and effectiveness from everyone in the information gathering process. Imagine what that staff could do with the time reserved to focus on the cabinet's goals and projects. Thoughtful consideration of what the staffing may look like, what that staff may need and how to fund those positions is needed in the next administration. The cabinet could benefit from a set of job descriptions for those involved with the cabinet and the Forum would be happy to work with you to develop them. Some ideas on how to support staff moving forward:

Model 1: Dedicated Staff from an Office of Children and Youth, etc. Staff member/s housed in an office that is performing other work related to children and youth. Examples: MD, NY, OR.

Model 2: Dedicated line item funding for one staff member in the executive office with strong MOUs for staff support from each of the agencies. Examples: none exist just like this but OH or CO come close.

Model 3: One agency dedicates the funding for a lead staff person but they are housed within another agency. Examples: ME.

Local Connections:

There are a number of ways that you could benefit from connecting in a more intentional or formal way with the local children's cabinets and/or children's services councils. Structurally it may require legislation to truly formalize the link but groundwork could be laid now for a solid working relationship. Sharing/training in the results framework, seeking the input of the local cabinets in some formal way, engaging in a joint project reaching out to business or foundations to support work together, etc. Some states are beginning to find creative ways to provide some support to communities that don't already have a local coordinating body for children by using their Americorps/VISTA programs and placing VISTAs as trained support staff for a local cabinet or council.

Stakeholder input:

"Meetings cannot be free and open due to combined membership (advocates and state agency leaders) They are prohibited from true openness to problem solve together."

"Agency leaders are at 30,000ft view and often times miss the details related to their broader policy recommendations that can be constrained by federal or lower level staff barriers."

"The cabinet does not have dedicated staff and must rely on folks who already have full time assignments."

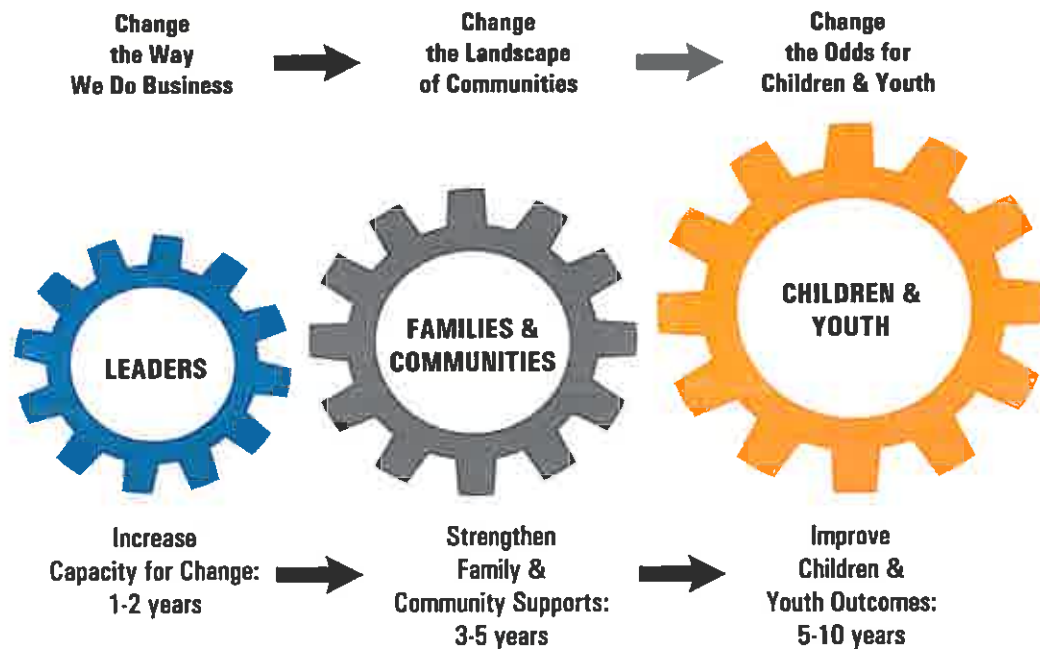
"Legislature should ask the cabinet to appear before it on an annual basis to assess effectiveness and should fund sufficient support staff."

"Need a focused business agenda with a capped amount of time for presentations."

BIGGER GOALS

Forum recommendations:

There are many potential driving frames in your strategic plan, but there is no clear single frame that stands out. In some ways it seems that you are comparing apples and oranges when you include goals around outcomes for kids, service needs, and the functioning of the cabinet in a comingled way. The Forum has helped cabinets align their work in three different buckets that correspond to the image below. It is useful to lay out goals and ways of tracking progress in each of these areas. How well are young people doing (the large gear), how many and how good are the supports and services that we provide (the middle gear), and what are we the cabinet doing to make a difference (the small gear).



Florida's Children and Youth Cabinet could benefit from clarifying the big public vision, a set of results statements, a corresponding set of indicators, and a corresponding set of performance measures for agencies to work toward in turning the curve on the indicators. Some work to examine the indicators in their totality and understand what is contributing to the way they look will help you move the strategic plan in the direction necessary and set some targets or benchmarks to track against.

Be sure that if the cabinet's stated purpose is to help all children and youth succeed that you do not isolate the work of the cabinet to one age group or issue. Working across age groups (0-24 years) and across developmental needs (learning, working, thriving, connecting, and leading) is hard but possible, we can share many examples of places that are doing it. You will, as the quote below wisely indicates, lose participation of those agency heads who don't feel their issues or age groups are being dealt with in the Cabinet. Everyone must see where their work to improve child and youth outcomes fits.

In the headline indicators that your work group selected there is an obvious omission of young people's educational success through high school and some kind of post secondary credential. There is also an omission of results or indicators about the socio-emotional well being of young people as well as their readiness for work and productivity. Before locking the headline indicators in any further we advise you to consider including some measures that will tell you how Florida is doing across the ages. Investing in early childhood is critical but not sufficient to produce "ready youth" that contribute to Florida's economic future. You will also lose some members of the cabinet if the 4 indicators are all that is focused on.

Finding a way to connect the work of the Children and Youth Cabinet to the Florida Performs goals and indicators (or whatever similar framework the new Governor adopts) will only help to integrate the cabinet into the daily thinking of the Governor. Of course you will want to work with the Governor's staff early as the experts on children and youth outcomes and shape those goals next administration.

Stakeholder input:

"Does not seem to include the aspects of youth, much of the discussion and focus is on the young child. Some agencies/departments seem to participate less as they interact more with the youth and feel the emphasis is not on that population. This statement is based on comments heard from those in the audience representing the youth population."

"Child outcome *framework* and state of the child should be linked to agency priorities."

"The cabinet lacks an organizing framework with clear goals, strategies, and plans for implementing change. The work done on indicators is a good foundation, but needs a framework to weave together clear strategies for effectuating comprehensive change."

BROADER PARTNERSHIPS

Forum recommendations:

External Partners:

There are many opportunities for the Florida Children and Youth Cabinet to partner with stakeholders around the state. It is welcome news that Florida will pursue a youth advisory body tied to the cabinet. The Forum has assisted many states with the inclusion of youth voice in the deliberations of their cabinet. It can have a profound and lasting impact on the work and its relevance and authenticity if done right. In our publication "Building Effective Youth Councils" we lay out many of the keys to doing this work.

Florida is rich in corporate and foundation leaders and possible champions to work with the cabinet to pursue a range of partnerships. Think creatively about ways to engage those individuals and use their expertise, in addition to financial support, to get some of the cabinet's ambitious work done. You could try engaging business or philanthropy leaders in sub groups or work groups of the cabinet.

Linked Initiatives:

The work you have done to map the various collaborative efforts for kids in the state of Florida is brilliant. One of the best roles a children's cabinet can play is to take responsibility for lining up all of the task forces, committees and councils that are in place to assist children and youth with specific issues. Now that the research is done, begin by forging relationships with those groups and it may be useful to request the legislature's help in becoming mandated to act as an umbrella to all child and youth related task forces and collaborative in the state so that you can have responsibility for aligning the work in a logical way. The Forum has tools that can help you think about the strength and focus of each of these "moving trains" and how work may be divided up and aligned among them. The Florida Children and Youth Cabinet should not only be seen as the umbrella to those efforts but should be mandated to be and to align that work in a logical way.

Stakeholder input:

From a number of external stakeholders the cabinet received many offers of help from TA, to policy briefs, to data tracking and research there are a wealth of stakeholders that can bring outside expertise to the cabinet.

"Appoint a youth advisory body to work with the cabinet."

"Use a portion of meetings for a member to make a presentation, identify areas for partnership, and get commitment for partnership from other members... to advance collective priorities."

BETTER DATA

Forum recommendations:

Having a solid results framework will allow your data collection efforts to connect better and have more relevance across departments. Make sure that you have decided as a cabinet on common data definitions and language. Think about the different types of data that you may want as a cabinet going forward. The Forum organizes data around those same three gears above. You need data that tells you how well individual young people are doing; data on quality, availability and participation in programs and services; and data on policies and resources, public opinion, aggregate level trend data and other data for decision makers. Your data system that is being built provides a great opportunity to pilot the work on individual child data that can, if connected up, tie to the program and service data and the decision making data. Connecting the Chief Information Officers of each agency is a great way to keep the work up to date, troubleshoot the system and ensure someone is looking at and using the data. It will be important to ensure that the next administration is bought in to Phase 2 of the project and understand the value and their role.

Connecting the data integration work of the cabinet with the data work of the Department of Education is both difficult and important work. Finding a simple starting data point to work on together might be the best way to begin rather than getting them to share their whole system across agency lines. We can point you to states that are doing this work between the Cabinet and the Department of Education and we also have a paper co-authored with the Data Quality Campaign entitled "Linking Data across Agencies States that are Making It Work" that could help make the case. The appointment of the CIO and Assistant Secretary of Education to the Data Committee will be a big help in this regard.

Stakeholder input:

"We need to monitor the technology for information sharing to see if it effectively improves the ability of agencies and the court to address the whole child."

"Would like to see more definitive products like the children's budget document."

BOLDER STRATEGIES

Forum recommendations:

Strategic Plan:

The strategic plan is a good start but does not dig deep enough to become truly actionable. In the next year the strategic plan could be improved by really nailing the results framework, setting some targets and building in a plan for evaluation of your work. The plan is meant to span the time from 2008 until completion but setting some measurable targets and identifying accountable parties would help make the plan more of a work plan. Not only state government should be included but the private sector must also commit to pieces of the plan. Doing this may require an action planning process and the Forum can coach you through ways to get that done.

Policy and Resource Alignment:

With the data system built, the state of the child report and headline indicator work continuing, and the children's budget completed, Florida will not be far from connecting those information sources using a common framework so that the cabinet members can really use that data to make decisions. Envision a cabinet meeting where members can examine parts of their framework for how well kids are doing in an area (trend data); how much is being spent to address it (budget data) and what that looks like on the ground and what agencies can do differently (performance measure data and information from your new individual child data system.) In an ideal world, the cabinet members would be able to look at how their agencies could work together to solve cross cutting issues like home visiting, high school completion, creating safe communities, or preparing the youth workforce. These are responsibilities of no one agency but many working in partnership. You are doing the right work now to make it possible for this to happen. Make sure that the individual projects connect; they use a common language and common frame; and are relevant to each department's existing language so that you can quickly move into decision-making with that data.

Quality Improvement:

There are ways that the cabinet could put in place a system to improve the quality of programs and establish use of common performance measures in a cross systems manner. States are looking at how to use a common assessment tool to measure quality; common training or intervention across departments to improve quality; and an incentive based approach to managing for quality (that our Ready by 21 Partners at the Weikart Center could share with you). This approach is being used in Iowa and New York and in fact the city of West Palm Beach was one of the early adopters of the work of the Weikart Center and could provide a good local model. In the economic climate that all states are currently in one way to become more efficient and effective is to make sure that the programs you are providing are of quality and are doing the job.

Public Messaging:

It makes sense that the cabinet was focused internally in these foundational years. You clearly have a commitment to visibility evident by the public meetings held in different areas of the state and the website allows for great transparency. In the coming years the cabinet may want to consider holding the official meetings in Tallahassee and then scheduling public listening sessions around the state. This may help in focusing the cabinet meetings themselves on moving the elements of the strategic plan. Many stakeholders suggested this and wanted less unrelated presentations and more participation of agency heads. But the large benefit is that listening sessions would provide a chance to gather data from the public and spread the message about the children's cabinet in a more visible way.

Stakeholder input:

Policy and Resource Alignment:

Already there are noted successes by a number of stakeholders, "having all of these folks at the table helped problem solve the wait list for foster youth," "Reduced barriers to enrollment for kids in SCHIP," "Children's Budget has helped us prioritize" and so on.

"Ultimately the cabinet should discern whether the priority indicators align with state investments. If not what should be done?"

"Legislature should adopt a Children's Impact Statement"

Quality:

"Mission is to ensure that policy relating to children and youth promotes collaboration and that the delivery of services is of quality."

Public Messaging:

"Much of the work of the cabinet to this point has been invisible to those not directly involved."

"Use members as spokespeople on agreed issues."