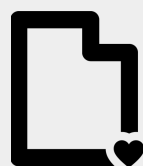




Early Childhood Utah Advisory Council

annual report
2023



Utah Department of
Health & Human
Services

The Early Childhood Utah Advisory Council

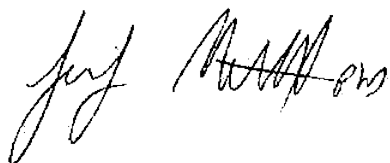
“The duties of the council include: improving and coordinating the quality of programs and services for children” (House Bill 48, 2023 Utah general legislative session)

A message from our ECU Advisory Council chairs, Dr. Jennifer Mitchell and Dr. Jared Lisonbee

The past year has been marked with extraordinary changes in the early childhood landscape in Utah. The Early Childhood Utah (ECU) Advisory Council remains attuned to the needs of young children and families and continues to adapt as needs evolve. More than 80 volunteer members who represent professional disciplines spanning the early childhood workforce remain a committed presence in the activities of ECU. One of the most exciting developments this past year is the intentional elevation of family voice within the ECU subcommittees. These individuals are informing the priorities of ECU based on the lived experience of families in the state who have young children. Perhaps more than ever, the ECU Advisory Council is positioned to improve the lives of Utah’s youngest citizens.

The council also recognized Codie Thurgood, LCSW, as she transitioned out of her role as chair for the council in January 2023. Ms. Thurgood’s tireless dedication to elevating the social-emotional needs of young children through intentional, coordinated efforts with key stakeholders served as a model for all those who work in the early childhood field. We remain indebted to Ms. Thurgood for her leadership and continued support and service in the work of the ECU Advisory Council. In October, Jared Lisonbee, Ph.D., transitioned into the role of co-chair for the council. Dr. Lisonbee serves as a preschool education specialist for the Utah State Board of Education and has served on the Data Research Subcommittee for 5 years. Dr. Lisonbee has worked in higher education and Head Start and is the past president of the Utah Association for the Education of Young Children governing board.

In the coming year, the council has committed to identify pathways for greater collaboration among all early childhood stakeholders across public and private entities and from all regions of the state.



Dr. Jennifer Mitchell



Dr. Jared Lisonbee

Join us

The Early Childhood Utah Advisory Council has 5 active subcommittees:

Early Care and Education

Parent Engagement, Support, and Education

Promoting Health and Access to Medical Homes

Social-emotional and Mental Health

Data and Research

We value input from parents and families, those who work with organizations and programs that serve children and families, and those who work on policy and governance on early childhood issues.

If you are interested in joining a subcommittee, contact Jennifer Floyd at jfloyd@utah.gov

Authorship of this report was led by the Data and Research Subcommittee. It was approved by the ECU Advisory Council and Executive Committee.

Highlights from the past year

The goal of the Early Childhood Utah (ECU) Advisory Council is to promote and support a strong foundation of health and well-being to make sure all Utah children enter school ready to learn and go on to lead healthy, happy, and productive lives by strengthening the coordination between Utah's diverse system of early childhood services.

Highlights of the work of the ECU Advisory Council and changes in the early care and education system in Utah include:

Office of Early Childhood

In May 2022, the newly merged Utah Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) established the Office of Early Childhood. This office houses several key early childhood programs and offers a central entity to coordinate the improved access and quality of programs serving Utah families with young children. It also provides staff support to the ECU Advisory Council and disseminates information across early childhood fields.

Early Childhood Amendments

[House Bill 48](#) was approved during the 2023 general legislative session. It repealed the Governor's Early Childhood Commission and transferred responsibilities to the ECU Advisory Council. The DHHS Office of Early Childhood will support the ECU Advisory Council to update all relevant rules, bylaws, and reports to reflect these new responsibilities and expectations.

- **There are 248,602 children younger than age 6 who reside in Utah. Approximately 8% experience poverty**
- **58% of 3–4 year-olds do not attend a preschool program**

Preschool Development Grant B-5

In late 2022, the DHHS Office of Early Childhood was awarded a Preschool Development Grant B-5 (PDG) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This 3-year grant offers an opportunity to advance work in all areas toward a coordinated and aligned early childhood system. In addition to an updated needs assessment and strategic plan, the grant work will include expanding training and coaching for the workforce and increased capacity at the local level to better serve families. Additionally, a one-stop early childhood coordinated intake and referral system is under development using grant funds and will be informed by the ECU Advisory Council and its subcommittees.



Implementation of the statewide developmental screening project

As approved by the ECU Advisory Council and Governor's Early Childhood Commission in 2021, work continues on implementing a statewide developmental screening project. This foundational work is funded with American Rescue Plan Act funding from the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS) Office of Child Care and will continue into the next year. Early childhood providers statewide promoted the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ-3), both Version 3 and Social-Emotional Version 2 (ASQ SE-2). Additionally, the following entities will administer separate system accounts and be available to their respective providers: DHHS, DWS Office of Child Care, Utah Head Start Association, and Help Me Grow Utah. Any education providers who opt to offer developmental screenings will use the DHHS account to enter information. Updates on this project and data related to screenings will be included in future annual reports.

Subcommittee highlights

The ECU Advisory Council accomplishes its work through 5 subcommittees. Each subcommittee has a chair or set of co-chairs that are nominated by the subcommittee and determined by a simple majority of voting members. Below is a summary of the work accomplished by each of the subcommittees during the past fiscal year.

Early Care and Education Subcommittee

Summary of activities

- Explored creation of an Early Childhood Workforce Development Board.
- Created a survey to assess use of early care and education guidance documents.

Early Childhood Workforce Development Board

The Governor's Early Childhood Commission (2020) recommended creation of an Early Childhood Workforce Development Board to align certification, licensure, compensation, competencies, and assessments of early educators across settings and with national standards to increase recruitment and retention. This board still needs to be established since housing it within the DWS State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) was determined a poor fit due to legislative requirements.

Survey on early care and education guidance documents

A survey was conducted in spring 2023 regarding the use of 3 guidance documents by early childhood providers: Core Competencies of Utah, Utah's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to Age Three, and Utah Core State Standards for Early Learning for Ages 3 to 5. The information collected from the survey is being used to guide future revisions to these documents to better align professional and curriculum standards across early childhood settings.

Availability of high-quality preschool services for children from low-income households

Utah is making progress to increase participation for low-income children and children who have disabilities in high-quality preschool programs.

- In the past year, 16,425 children ages 3-5 years participated in preschool in a local education agency. This includes 16,216 children enrolled in a school district preschool and 209 children enrolled in a charter school preschool. This is an increase of nearly 500 children from the previous year (Utah State Board of Education, 2022-2023).
- Of those children served by district preschool programs, 7,311 had a disability and were enrolled in federally funded early childhood special education (Part B), an increase of 160 children from the previous year. In addition, 51% of these children received services in a classroom where at least 50% of the students were without disabilities (Utah State Board of Education December 1, 2022, child count).
- 1,150 children ages 3-5 years participated in a private preschool program that was certified as "High Quality" or "High Quality Plus" by the DWS Office of Child Care.
- 3,244 children aged 3 and 4 participated in local federally funded Head Start programs with at least 2,400 from households with lower incomes and 425 students who were diagnosed with a disability (Utah Head Start Association, 2022–2023).
- The Expanded Student Access Grant provided funding for 2,125 children aged 3 and 4 from economically disadvantaged families and English learner students to participate in preschool programs at a local education agency (1,681 children) and private preschool settings (532 children). This was a decrease of more than 800 funded available slots from the prior school year. Costs of providing quality preschool services increased during 2022, but funding did not. Without an increase in funding, these slots will be further reduced next year (Utah State Board of Education 2022–2023, Utah Office of Child Care).

Childcare subsidies

The number of children younger than age 6 who receive a childcare subsidy has remained relatively stable over the past year. However, an initial estimate for May 2023 suggests only a small percentage of these children may be participating in care rated as "High Quality" or "High Quality Plus" by the DWS Office of Child Care. A limitation of this data is that only 27% of licensed centers and 8% of licensed family childcare programs in Utah actively participate in the Utah Child Care Quality System to receive a certified quality rating.

- 12,756 children younger than age 6 received a childcare subsidy in 2022.
- Only 6% of these children participate in a "High Quality" or "High Quality Plus" childcare program.

Opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally and state-funded childcare and early childhood education services

Representatives from private childcare, public preschool, Head Start, and various education settings actively participate on the ECU Advisory Council and the Early Care and Education Subcommittee. These stakeholders have identified opportunities and barriers for collaboration and coordination across early childhood education services.

Opportunity	Barrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forming a group to look at what policies, curriculum standards, and definitions can be aligned across settings and which national standards can be used to recruit and retain a more qualified workforce. ● Reviewing the use of early care and education guidance documents helped the ECU Advisory Council consider ways to better align across educator preparation programs, training, professional expectations, and standards for children across all early childhood settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rigid competencies and standards in some early care and education settings. ● Some believe Utah should adopt nationally recognized guidance documents while others prefer Utah-specific documents. ● Certification, licensure, compensation, competencies, assessments, and requirements of the early care and education workforce vary widely across early care and education settings. ● Funding differences perpetuate inconsistencies. ● The methods used to assess the quality of early childhood programs vary across settings and participation is not required for all programs. This makes it difficult to consistently and accurately measure how many children in low-income households are being served in high-quality early education settings.

Recommendations

- Make sure the Early Childhood Workforce Development Board responsibilities are addressed through the ECU Advisory Council to better support the recruitment and retention of high-quality early childhood professionals across all early care and education settings in Utah.
- Form a committee of subject matter experts to revise and rewrite Utah's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to Age Three, originally published in 2007, to improve alignment across early childhood settings and incorporate current research and recognized standards documents.
- Develop plans for dissemination, future updates, and incorporation of a revised Utah's Early Learning Guidelines for Birth to Age Three document into training for professionals across birth to age 3 settings.

Parent Engagement, Support, and Education Subcommittee

Summary of activities

- Updated the purpose statement of the Parent Engagement, Support, and Education Subcommittee.
- Explored what “improved access to” and “awareness of services” means and looks like.
- Added 5 new parents of children aged 0-8 to the subcommittee.
- Held an event to recruit additional parent voices to the subcommittee.

Participation in federal, state, and local family support and education programs in Utah

Home visiting is a service delivery strategy that matches expectant parents and caregivers of young children with a designated support person. The DHHS Home Visiting Program oversees 8 home visiting programs and serves approximately 597 children and their families in 10 counties throughout Utah. At the same time, an estimated 212,300 pregnant women and families with children younger than age 6 could benefit from home visiting (National Home Visiting Resource Center, Yearbook 2022).

Utah is making progress to increase participation in family support and education programs in Utah. In 2022,

- The Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting federal funding served 581 families. State-funded programs served an additional 182 families.
- Local Early Head Start federally funded programs served 722 infants and toddlers. Ninety-five percent of these children are from families with lower incomes and 18% are children who were diagnosed with a disability.
- The Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind (USDB) Parent Infant Program for the Blind and Visually Impaired served 588 children.
- The USDB Parent Infant Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing served 699 children.
- Help Me Grow Utah, which receives funding from state agencies, is a parent information line that connects families to pregnancy and child development information and community resources. Help Me Grow served 6,480 families, with 2,977 families newly enrolled and 3,501 continuing participation. This is an increase of approximately 2,000 families from the previous year.
- 43,923 children younger than age 6 received benefits from the supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP). This is a decrease of nearly 6,000 children from 2021.
- 2,752 children received benefits from the federal program temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) under the Family Employment Program. This is a decrease of approximately 800 children from 2021.

Opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child health and development services

Members of the Parent Engagement, Support, and Education Subcommittee have identified opportunities and barriers for collaboration and coordination across child health and development services and programs.

Opportunity	Barrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It is anticipated that federal requirements will change and require matching dollars in the coming years, which may expand opportunities and funding to serve more families. ● Restructuring home visiting programs to tailor services to the strengths and needs of each family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strict federal regulations on how funding may be spent. ● Home visiting programs not funded by the DHHS are not required to report data to the state. This makes it difficult to assess needs and gaps.

Recommendations

- Add additional parents, guardians, and caregivers from diverse circumstances to the ECU Advisory Council and each subcommittee to make sure parent needs are addressed in a variety of settings across the state.

Promoting Health and Access to Medical Homes Subcommittee

Summary of activities

- Explored available perinatal and postnatal lactation support offered by various organizations around the state, including through telelactation services.
- Reviewed the [NACCHO Continuity of Care in Breastfeeding Support: A Blueprint for Communities](#) in relation to current practice in Utah.

Participation in federal, state, and local early childhood health and development programs

Utah is making progress to increase participation in early childhood health and development services and programs in Utah.

- Approximately 40% of Utah children ages 9 months to 35 months received an annual developmental screening in 2020–2021. This was an increase of more than 10% since 2018–2019 (National Survey of Children’s Health).
- The Children’s Health Coverage Amendments (Senate Bill 217, 2023 Utah State Legislative Session) has resulted in \$4.5 million to supplement the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). This funding will allow CHIP to prioritize and enroll 2,000 children whose families are at 200% of the federal poverty level or below and are currently ineligible for CHIP coverage due to their family’s immigration status. Medicaid and CHIP serve about 72,000 Utah children younger than age 6 from low-income households.
- The Utah Women’s Infant and Children Program provided nutritional support to 50,550 children up to the age of 5, from households with incomes up to 185% of the federal poverty level.
- In 2022, 7,833 ASQ-3 screening results were transferred into the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS). Of these, 25% of children screened were below the cutoff in at least 1 domain, which indicates a need for further evaluation of a developmental delay or disability. This is an increase of 10% of children who need further evaluation since 2017.
- 251 children younger than age 6 were served by the DHHS Integrated Service Program. . Of these children, about 51% received Medicaid, indicating they were from low-income households. The Integrated Service Program is funded through the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant (Title V). It provides care coordination to children and youth with special healthcare needs across the state and very limited direct clinical services to this same population in 4 rural health districts.
- In 2021, Utah Baby Watch Early Intervention Part C served 15,800 infants and toddlers with an eligible developmental delay or disability, regardless of income. It’s estimated that approximately 38% of these children were from low-income households who received Medicaid or CHIP, with 56% paying no fee to participate in early intervention services based on family size and income.

Opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child health and development services and with early care and education programs

Members of the Promoting Health and Access to Medical Homes Subcommittee have identified opportunities and barriers for collaboration and coordination across child health and development services and programs.

Opportunity	Barrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant opportunity exists in the new DHHS Office of Early Childhood to break down silos and work collaboratively with agencies like DWS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to share data among stakeholders due to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 42 CFR, and other release of information concerns. Grant reporting requirements involve disparate data sets. There is no central repository of longitudinal data to look at outcomes.

Recommendations

- Promote universal developmental screening for children younger than age 6 using the ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE:2 screenings.
- Promote a unified and actionable message to reproductive-aged individuals regarding the importance and benefits of breastfeeding through the first 2 years of an infant's life.

Social-emotional and Mental Health Subcommittee

Summary of activities

- Responded to feedback from parents of young children during the Preschool Development Grant strategic planning session, parent input, and outreach discussion.

Preschool Development Grant B-5

In state fiscal year 2023, the Social-emotional, and Mental Health Subcommittee responded to parent feedback received during the Preschool Development Grant B-5 strategic planning session, parent input, and outreach discussion. Parents urged Utah early care and education providers to:

- Increase training to help staff manage challenging behaviors of children in their care.
- Reduce expulsions and suspensions from early care and education settings.
- Increase support to children and their families after the children have been suspended or expelled from early care and education settings.

The subcommittee also completed its initial efforts to reduce and eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline practices in early care, health, and education settings by defining the practices. The practices shown in the table below were discussed and approved for statewide adoption by the ECU Advisory Council.

Definitions of exclusionary discipline practices	
Purpose statement	Utah is committed to identify and implement evidence-informed, equitable, and culturally responsive practices in early care, health, and education settings to prevent and reduce exclusion, expulsion, and suspension due to challenging behaviors or health-related conditions.
Challenging behaviors	Challenging behaviors are repeated patterns of behaviors that impair a child's healthy development, learning, and relationships with peers and adults.

Planned transitions	Planned transition is the practice of early care, health, and education settings collaboratively and actively supporting a child and family in successfully finding and accessing services at an alternate setting to better meet the child's individual needs. Planned transition occurs only after the implementation of reasonable interventions and accommodations were unsuccessful.
Early care, health, and education settings	Early care, health, and education settings promote the health, development, and education of children from birth to 8 years of age.
Exclusionary discipline	Exclusionary discipline refers to expulsion, suspension, soft expulsion, or any type of disciplinary action by a provider that prevents or reduces the child's opportunities to engage fully in their early care and education setting.
Expulsion	Expulsion is when a provider permanently terminates the enrollment of a child from early care and education settings due to challenging behaviors that are actual or perceived. This does not include a planned transition to another early care and education setting that more appropriately meets the needs of the child.
Soft expulsion	Soft expulsion is when an early care and education setting is not a viable or welcoming care arrangement for a child and their family, which ultimately results in a family withdrawing their child from the setting.
Suspension	Suspension refers to the disciplinary practice of temporarily reducing the amount of time or days a child may attend an early care and education setting or participate in the setting's activities. This does not include planned transitions or accommodation previously agreed upon to meet the needs of the child.
In-school suspension	In-school suspension is the disciplinary practice of temporarily removing a child from activities in the classroom or care setting, while keeping them in the same early care and education setting.
Out-of-school suspension	Out-of-school suspension is the disciplinary practice of temporarily removing a child from their early care and education setting.
Disenrollment	Disenrollment occurs when a healthcare setting refuses to support or serve a child due to challenging behaviors or family difficulties. When disenrollment occurs in an early care and education setting, it is considered expulsion.

Social and emotional screening of children in the Utah Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS, pronounced E-Kids)

In 2022, data from ECIDS showed 4,189 children aged 5 and younger were screened using the ASQ-SE:2 screenings, with 17% of children screened indicating a need for further evaluation. This is an increase of 4% of children needing further evaluation since 2017.

Utah is making progress to increase access to social-emotional, and mental health services for Utah children:

- 2,470 children ages birth to age 6 received mental health services through the Utah public mental health system in fiscal year 2022.



- One in 8 Utah women is affected by postpartum depression and 1 in 3 will experience anxiety or depressive symptoms during pregnancy or after giving birth. The Maternal Mental Health Toolkit developed by the DHHS Office of Maternal and Child Health offers essential information to identify and treat perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Since August 2022, 165 providers have implemented the toolkit.
- In 2022, the DHHS Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS), in partnership with many community-based agencies, served 3,426 children in foster care with the goal to provide permanency; safety; and enduring relationships, along with a sense of family, stability, and belonging in the least restrictive setting possible.

Opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child programs

Members of the Social-emotional and Mental Health Subcommittee have identified opportunities and barriers for collaboration and coordination across child health and development services and programs.

Opportunity	Barrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DHHS recently funded statewide expansion of the Utah Pyramid Model Project (UPMP) to help reduce and track exclusionary discipline practices in Utah. This work, led by Utah State University, creates collaboration between early childhood entities and was funded by the Preschool Development Grant B-5. ● This will increase the capacity of teachers, home visitors, and other early childhood providers to manage challenging behaviors and reduce exclusionary discipline practices of children from early care and education settings. ● It will also give Utah officials data to better support children and families from the use of exclusionary practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Additional data are needed to better assess the detrimental use of exclusionary discipline practices in early care, health, and education settings in Utah. ● More early childhood mental health professionals, services, and supports are needed in Utah to meet the need, especially in rural areas.

Recommendations

- Explore the successful efforts of other states that are reducing exclusionary practices across early care and education settings.
- Send out parent and provider surveys to collect more data to better understand the current use of exclusionary discipline practices in Utah.
- Hold parent and provider listening and education sessions on the newly adopted definitions of the practices of exclusionary discipline practices to support their implementation across systems, services, and settings.
- Develop a robust and coordinated data tracking system for expulsion and suspension.
- Develop a statewide policy or recommend legislation to support the reduction and elimination of exclusionary practices in early care, health, education settings.

Data and Research Subcommittee

Summary of activities

- Capitalized on the momentum of sharing data across service providers and expanded access to new shared data.
- Identified barriers that might prevent programs from participation in data sharing.
- Worked with other ECU Advisory Council subcommittees to highlight research relevant to their agendas.
- Updated the annual report template.
- The DHHS and DWS staff worked to propose a research topic for Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) longitudinal research at the Utah Data Research Center.
- Reviewed and provided feedback on ASQ and ECIDS data and project status updates.
- Discussed and expanded the body of understanding surrounding early care and education program enrollment and participation.

Evaluation of metrics and data used to guide the work of Early Childhood Utah in 2022 showed a need to align strategic plan and annual report priorities and metrics. This will be a priority for the 2023–2024 fiscal year.

Opportunities and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally funded and state-funded child programs

Members of the Data and Research Subcommittee have identified opportunities and barriers for collaboration and coordination across child health and development services and programs.

Opportunity	Barrier
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaboration and coordination are needed to identify outcome metrics that include equity indicators. The new DHHS Office of Early Childhood will lead these collaboration efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misalignment between strategic priorities and metrics for the strategic plan and annual report.• Lack of funding for data analysis and interpretation to identify gaps and provide recommendations in the annual report that can inform strategic planning.

Recommendations

- Strategic plan priorities and metrics should be updated every 5 years.
- Explore creating a shortened version of the annual report.
- The annual report should track progress on strategic priorities using identified metrics.
- Focus the annual report on progress toward outcomes outlined in the [Utah PDG-B5 Strategic Plan](#).
- Use the Early Childhood Utah website (<https://earlychildhoodutah.utah.gov/>) for full reporting on subcommittee activities.
- Identify funding for the annual report data evaluation.

Relevant links

[Utah PDG-B5 Strategic Plan](#)

[Utah PDG-B5 Needs Assessment](#)

[Utah House Bill 48](#)

[2021-2022 ECU Annual Report](#)