

# **2020 STATE POLICY SURVEY:**

**CHILD & YOUTH POLICY  
COORDINATING BODIES  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS  
SPRING 2021**

the  
**forum**  
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ABOUT THE STATE CHILDREN'S CABINET NETWORK</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A STATEMENT ON EQUITY</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>WHAT IS A CABINET?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>+ OKLAHOMA CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM 2020</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>AGE RANGES ON WHICH CABINETS FOCUS</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>+ OREGON CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>WHERE CABINETS ARE ORGANIZATIONALLY HOUSED</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>+ CONNECTICUT CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>HOW CABINETS ARE STAFFED</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>+ NEW YORK CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>HOW CABINETS ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>+ SOUTH CAROLINA CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>HOW CABINETS USE DATA AND EVIDENCE</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>+ MINNESOTA CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>+ RHODE ISLAND CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	
<b>CABINET HIGHLIGHT</b>	<b>24</b>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Forum for Youth Investment deeply appreciates the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation for this report and for supporting the State Children’s Cabinet Network. We would like to acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation.

In addition, we are particularly grateful to the many children’s cabinets that completed the 2020 State Policy Survey and to all children’s cabinets for their tremendous work to support thriving and equity for children and youth:

Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC)  
Colorado Early Childhood Leadership Commission  
Colorado Statewide Youth Development Plan  
Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana  
Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO)  
Georgia Children’s Cabinet  
Illinois Early Learning Council  
Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development Council  
Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund (KCCTF)  
Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Advisory Council  
Maryland Children’s Cabinet  
Minnesota Children’s Cabinet  
Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council  
New Jersey Council for Young Children and Head Start programs  
New Mexico Children’s Cabinet  
New York State Council on Children and Families  
North Carolina Child Well-Being Transformation Council  
Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth  
Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board  
Oregon Youth Development Council  
Pennsylvania Mental Health Planning Council  
Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet  
Rhode Island Early Learning Council  
South Carolina C Early Childhood Advisory Council  
Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth  
Utah Governor’s Early Childhood Commission  
Vermont Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council



# ABOUT THE STATE CHILDREN'S CABINET NETWORK (SCCN)

It's well known that no single support or program is enough to ensure that children and youth are on track developmentally, educationally, socially, and emotionally. Moreover, many of the systems that serve youth have built-in legacies of racial injustice and inequity that disrupt young people's positive development and thriving.

It's well known that no single support or program is enough to ensure that children and youth are on track developmentally, educationally, socially, and emotionally. Moreover, many of the systems that serve youth have built-in legacies of racial injustice and inequity that disrupt young people's positive development and thriving.

Unfortunately, the manner in which rules, regulations, and government structures are crafted makes it difficult for leaders to create and implement coordinated programs and services that address the comprehensive needs of young people and that actively work to heal injustice and inequity. But increasingly, local, state, and federal leaders are striving to acknowledge, address, and even center justice and equity and to simplify and untangle the patchwork of rigid policies and funding streams so that they serve children and youth effectively.

At the state level, many leaders are doing this work through children's cabinets, a catch-all term for an array of policy-coordinating bodies that focus holistically on children and youth. Children's cabinets are composed of leaders from government agencies and, in some cases, outside stakeholders as well. They create a shared vision, goals, and strategies to create equitable opportunities and be accountable for children and youth to thrive in learning, in development, and in life.

The Forum for Youth Investment serves and supports state children's cabinets and their leaders through the State Children's Cabinet Network, which creates a unique forum for convening, sharing challenges and solutions, and pressing forward in our shared commitment to ensuring equitable opportunities for all young people to thrive.

# FOREWORD

Let's be honest—from a data collection standpoint, March 2020 was a complicated time to launch our latest iteration of the biennial State Children's Cabinets Survey. As the COVID-19 pandemic roared across the country and states became consumed with identifying and meeting the needs of residents—children, families, and adults alike—a survey was the last task on people's minds. While some states completed the survey before the pandemic hit in full force, many shared their responses over the summer of 2020 or later in the fall. We are grateful for all of those responses and for the monumental work that so many state leaders, personnel, and partners have put into this deeply and uniquely demanding year.

In terms of data analysis and year-over-year comparisons, it's easy to identify the problems caused by inconsistency in the timing of when states responded and the challenges in making meaning of the functions and priorities that cabinets identified. In addition to COVID-19 and the equity chasms it laid bare, states have grappled with racial justice in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the public reckonings and protests that followed. Responses to survey questions about equity, areas of focus, and other factors may have been affected by whether a state responded in March or in October. Moreover, because this survey intends to capture state work spanning a two-year period, how could any survey take a snapshot that truly represents both 2019 and 2020—years of such dramatically different social, health, and political consciousness and context?

**Then there's the bright side.**

Alongside the challenges, we recognize and embrace the rich trove of data that states have shared and the evolution of policy-coordinating bodies that we continue to witness. We can see both shifts and consistencies in the landscape since our last report, released at the very end of 2017. The diversity of structures and focus across the country's cabinets reminds us of the layered needs that children and youth have across the spectrum of development and across the array of critical services that governments provide. Potential unevenness in the data reflects a picture of real-time changes occurring for children and youth across the country during a turbulent period.

Because we work with state children's cabinets on a regular basis, this report also incorporates bold steps and new directions that cabinets have recently taken up and that may not be captured in survey responses, adding depth to our understanding of the raw data and a sense of direction to the work that cabinets will likely undertake in the next two years and beyond. Trends around engaging youth in policymaking,



expanding the scope of cabinets' membership, and making equity central to this work are exciting and promising. These trends also reflect the desire and need for broader and deeper partnerships that we've seen as cabinets have activated to meet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

So, given these many factors, how should this report be used?

At the most basic level, this report helps to paint the picture of key child and youth policy-coordinating bodies that exist in states, along with their goals, their accomplishments, and their challenges. Within the Forum, we are using the report to shape priorities and supports for the State Children's Cabinet Network, to shine light on the hard and important work happening across states, and to challenge ourselves to collaborate effectively with stakeholders of all kinds—states, localities, youth, federal policymakers, and partners from diverse types of organizations. We hope this survey provides you with useful insights about how states coordinate to serve young people, inspires you with new ideas or commitments to action, and supports you in continuing to improve policies and practices to truly change the odds for all young people.

# A STATEMENT ON EQUITY

Our recent biennial surveys have shown a significant increase in the numbers of child- and youth-focused coordinating bodies across the country committing to be more equity-centric in their work. When we consider the surplus of quantitative data and qualitative evidence that describes the consistent disparities in education, health, housing, well-being, and other areas that our public systems produce for children and youth of color, we at the Forum consider these pivots toward implementing more equitable practices and policies as essential progress. This is particularly pertinent as equity remains our continued priority for the future of our State Children’s Cabinet Network.

Nearly every state children’s cabinet expressed that it is continuing (as reported in 2016–2017) to prioritize equity in some form or another. Of responding cabinets, 44 percent said they have held internal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) trainings that focus on anti-racist and racial equity frameworks; 42 percent reported the continued disaggregation of data to understand and address disparities across demographics; and 44 percent said they were actively pursuing equity-centric goals. Sixteen percent of cabinets are simultaneously prioritizing all three of these domains.

And while these moves toward equity are encouraging, the 2019–2020 survey also revealed how making effective equity pivots is challenging, complex work—and many cabinets have struggled to achieve substantial gains within this context. For instance, 48 percent of cabinets acknowledged that they are still in the exploratory phase of identifying exactly how to “pursue equity.” None of the cabinets that contributed to this survey reported that they were engaged in more than two different racial and social equity efforts. Only two cabinets were able to claim a legislative policy victory that removed discriminatory barriers that were negatively impacting young people.

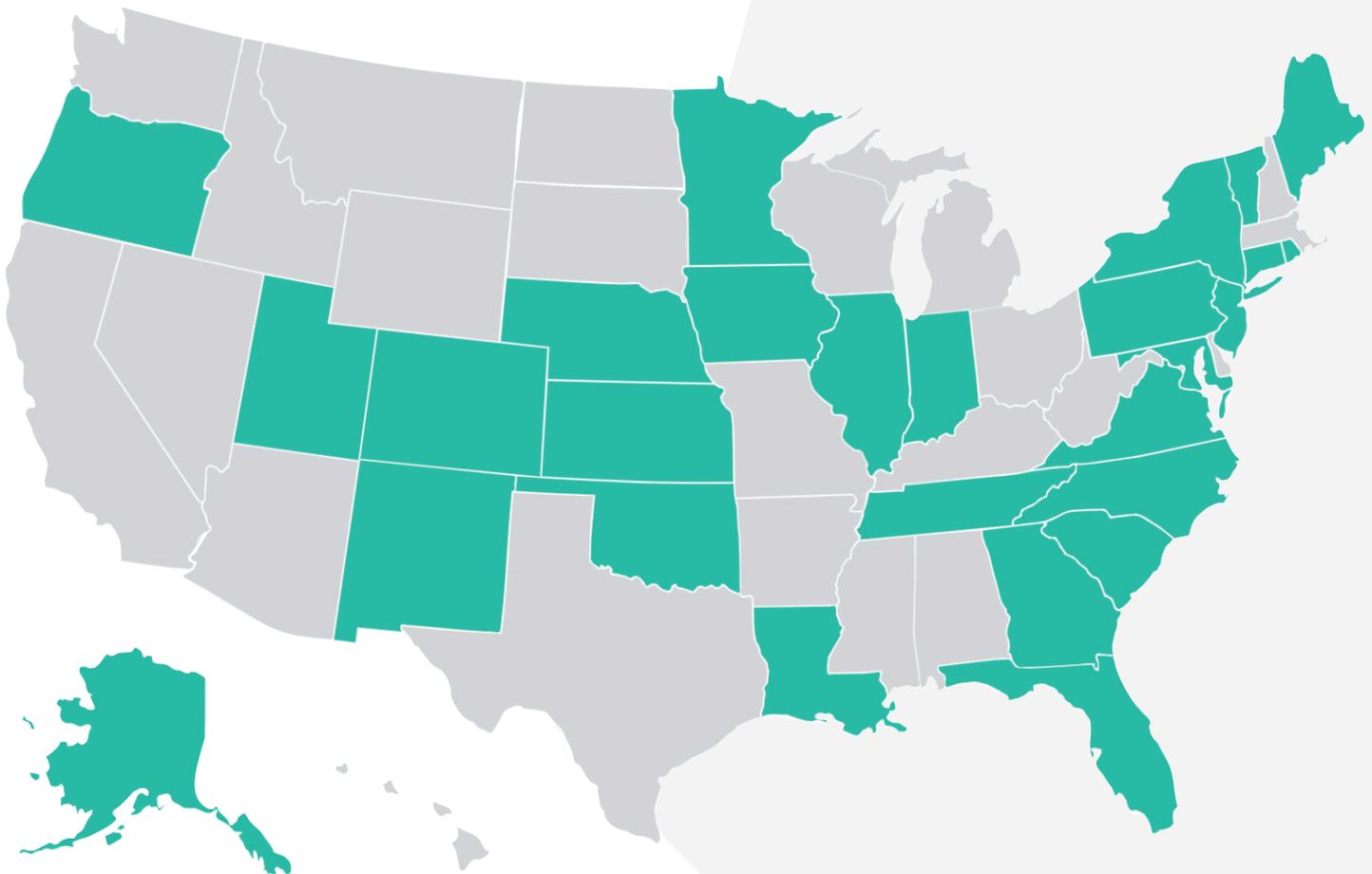
This statement is not a condemnation nor a criticism of individual cabinets or the State Children’s Cabinet Network at large. Instead, it is an acknowledgment of how difficult it can be to galvanize conversations about equity into equitable practices and policies that bring about real and tangible change for young people of color and other oppressed identities. The tumultuous year 2020 highlighted this gap between dialogue and action better than any survey ever could.

As the State Children’s Cabinet Network moves forward into an evolving cultural climate, we at the Forum for Youth Investment hope that we can support and inspire those we work with to commit to dismantling the systemic dynamics, practices, and policies that have been designed to oppress young people of color and other disadvantaged groups in our communities. It is our promise that future children’s cabinet surveys will continue framing findings in an equity-centric context.

# WHAT IS A CABINET?

Given that “children’s cabinet” serves as a catch-all term for an array of policy-coordinating bodies focused on children and youth, it is difficult to fully differentiate between different models and structures employed by different states. A wide variety of names and entities all fit under the larger umbrella that makes up the State Children’s Cabinet Network. To that end, below are common categories of names that states use and characteristics most common to these categories. These terms do not offer hard and fast definitions so much as descriptions of the trends apparent in the field. Additionally, throughout this report the terms “cabinet” and “coordinating body” will be used interchangeably, unless otherwise noted.

Bodies that use the term *children’s cabinet* are often established through executive order or legislation and managed by or in conjunction with a governor’s or first spouse’s office. For example, where a children’s cabinet is established by statute, the governor may issue executive orders that outline priorities for years or terms. Membership usually consists



of the heads of children- and youth-serving departments without significant outside membership for state agency leaders to collaborate on policy decision making. Children's cabinets typically focus on a broad set of outcomes and ages.

**Bodies that use the terms *interagency council, commission, and collaboration*** tend to have the widest range of stakeholder membership, ranging from state agency career staff to community and youth representatives to legislators themselves. They are often led from a particular executive branch agency or even by another branch of government. While these coordinating bodies may have a broad mandate, they sometimes have a narrower focus on a specific population, developmental stage, or type of service.

**Bodies that use the term *early childhood council*** often are responding directly to federal legislation calling for early childhood advisory councils. These types of coordinating bodies tend to have a broad spectrum of membership comprised of agency leaders, private service providers, and philanthropy, and focus primarily on children from birth through ages 5 or 8 and their families.



The Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Board created a five-year early childhood strategic plan focused on creating equitable access to programs and outcomes. This work was supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five, and the plan was created based on a comprehensive needs assessment and extensive input from state agencies, community leaders, and families.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS AND CONTEXT FROM CABINET CONVERSATIONS IN 2020

The 2020 State Children’s Cabinet Network (SCCN) Survey Report consists of raw survey data and additional qualitative data that are the culmination of numerous interactions with cabinets over the course of the last year and a half. Given the time frame in which the survey was disseminated, some cabinet responses predate the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, while others were submitted in the winter of 2021. Naturally, these events greatly influenced cabinets’ priorities in ways that the survey does not fully capture. Below are three trends from 2020 that emerged from the Forum’s virtual events, technical assistance contacts, and one-on-one conversations with cabinets, which provide important context to complement the survey findings.

## ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IS A TRENDING PRACTICE

Since the last survey in 2017, more cabinets stepped back from youth and family engagement, both because of the virtual nature of 2020 and because of the need for more effective policies and practices designed to reach young people. Engagement is developmentally important to support adolescents’ sense of agency and identity, to channel their creativity and problem-solving, to strengthen their relationships, and to identify inequities that can disrupt positive development. It is also important to consider engagement as a critical step that can strengthen policy and practices, which—if not directly informed by young people’s lived experiences, priorities, and knowledge—will necessarily have limited relevance and effectiveness. This trend became especially visible in the summer of 2020, when the Forum launched a Realizing the Opportunity for All Youth Learning Cohort, which helped cabinets translate the science of adolescent development into policy action. All participating state cabinets focused on elevating youth voices and dismantling “adultism” within policymaking. Additionally, some cabinets are working to institutionalize stronger roles for young people in decision-making processes.

## CHILDCARE TAKES NEW SHAPE AND PRIORITY

The unprecedented pandemic made it evident that childcare plays a critical role not just in children’s lives but also in the well-being of families, communities, and the economy. Its impact reverberates across all sectors and affects stakeholders from across all youth-serving entities committed to preserving and prioritizing childcare systems, networks, and infrastructure for the long term.

This crisis also sparked conversations among stakeholders and policymakers over how childcare is defined and whether we have been viewing childcare through an antiquated lens. For example, with many schools being closed or virtual in 2020, the custodial role

that the K–12 system plays became sharply apparent, challenging our definitions of and assumptions about “child” and “childcare” in ways that can inform and strengthen systemic supports for both very young and school-aged children into the future by more fully recognizing the needs, societal implications, and providers of custodial care.

## **STRATEGIC PLANS LAY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS**

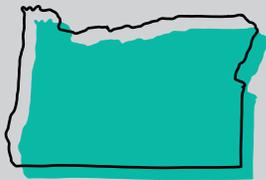
In a year that upended everyone’s plans, it’s fair to question the value of having a multiyear strategic plan. For cabinets that have them, however, the investment of time and planning paid off by creating a framework with clear priorities and expectations for working together, even amid heightened unpredictability.

Strategic plans helped cabinets like the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana (CISC) more fluidly adapt to pandemic circumstances while responding to strategic priorities. For example, the CISC’s three-year strategic plan included the goal to “promote interagency communication and collaboration to improve prevention and outcomes and address the unique and complex needs of Juvenile Justice and/or cross-system involved youth.” Shifting juvenile court hearings to virtual became a critical need during the pandemic, and the CISC structure prioritized and supported this transition for court hearings along with benefits processes and other interactions with youth and families in coordinated ways that enabled programs and departments to learn from one another in real time.

## AGE RANGES ON WHICH CABINETS FOCUS

The work of coordinating bodies inherently impacts children of all ages and their families, but most bodies consolidate their resources and develop their strategic plans in ways that enable them to target specific age ranges for maximum efficacy. About a third (nine cabinets) work to address young people’s needs across the entire age spectrum of birth through adolescence, which concludes in a person’s mid-20s. Within that broad work, these cabinets typically prioritize goals that pertain to one or two age groups. In many states, coordinating bodies such as early childhood councils specifically target early childhood, in keeping with federal requirements for early childhood advisory councils under the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007.

Cabinets’ tendency to focus on multiple age ranges shows in the data—with **40 percent** of responding cabinets serving kids across the entire age spectrum (birth to mid-20s). When broken down into subgroups, **88 percent** of cabinets concentrate on early childhood (birth to age 5), **60 percent** concentrate on young people between the ages of 6 and 10, **56 percent** concentrate on ages 11 to 18, and **52 percent** on ages 19 to 25.



The Oregon Youth Development Council (YDC) collaborated with the Oregon Youth Development Division and is excited to announce that it has launched a new statewide reengagement system and funding model to serve youth ages 14 to 21 who are out of school or off track for on-time graduation. This system will align education, workforce development, and supportive services, and increase coordination and resources for disconnected youth.

# DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS THAT CABINETS ADDRESS

All 25 responding coordinating bodies said they focus on multiple outcome areas, which the Forum considers a best practice. It is our belief that support systems can have the greatest impact on young people by adopting a blended approach that targets multiple needs.

While nearly all coordinating bodies concentrate on multiple developmental areas, most survey respondents reported **social-emotional learning, mental and behavioral health, postsecondary readiness, and physical health and well-being** as their primary focuses.

Cabinets that prioritize older youth (between the ages of 11 and 18) primarily focus on fostering **cultural and civic engagement** and providing **vocational training and workforce development** and **postsecondary readiness**.

While these developmental areas are considered traditional areas of focus for children's cabinets, we want to begin reframing why the disparities across groups in these areas have come to be—and that starts with acknowledging that they are inherently tied to the systemic inequities and overt racism directed toward the systems that impact the young people we serve.

As children's cabinets work to become more race- and equity-conscious, we anticipate that some of these developmental areas will continue their shifts toward addressing root cause issues—for instance, when we look at the health and well-being developmental area, we find that cabinets have been focusing on addressing health disparities as the issue, not as a symptom of the systemic issues that are creating those very health disparities.

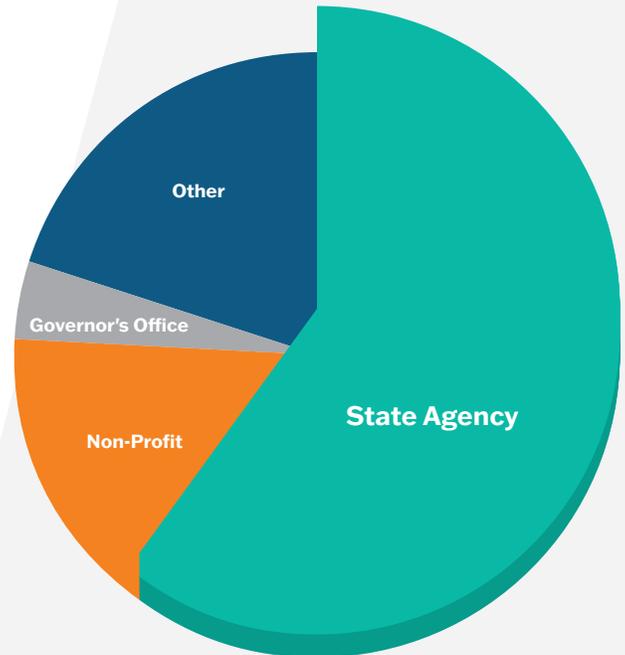
As of this survey, 44 percent of cabinets have committed to “embedding equity into their partnerships” in the coming years. We are excited to see what these commitments bring to bear as they work with broader systemic objectives.

# WHERE CABINETS ARE ORGANIZATIONALLY HOUSED

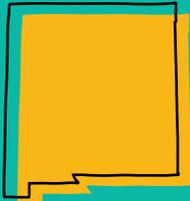
Of this year’s survey respondents, **60 percent** reported that their coordinating bodies are housed in individual executive branch agencies rather than in a governor’s office, a non-executive branch agency, or as a freestanding entity. A coordinating body’s organizational home can play a significant role in shaping its scope, impact, longevity, and approach to leveraging stakeholders. However, rather than a single organizational placement being the best in all circumstances, different locations come with different trade-offs.

Embedding a coordinating body in an agency outside of the governor’s office can foster sustainability through gubernatorial transitions because the body may be less politicized. For example, the coordinating bodies for Louisiana, Nebraska, and New Jersey are housed within their respective Departments of Education. On the other hand, a coordinating body housed in a governor’s or first spouse’s office may be better positioned to act as a neutral convener, to create a mandate, or to foster a sense of urgency that engages other state agencies in the coordinating body’s work.

WHERE CABINETS ARE HOUSED



In Connecticut, the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO) houses the Parent Leadership Training Institute, the Statewide Collaborative on Social Emotional Learning and School Climate, the state’s Two-Generational (2Gen) Initiative (two-generational approaches build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together). CWCSEO was able to promote policies that have increased access to employment opportunities for families, early care and education for kids, and restorative practices for young people—and the Forum looks forward to sharing these data when they become publicly available.



The New Mexico Children’s Cabinet (NMCC), housed in the Office of the Governor, is a cabinet whose organizational home allows it to make quick pivots to address immediate issues, leaving it relatively unencumbered by bureaucratic processes.

For example, in 2020 NMCC capitalized on its placement in the governor’s office by making quick moves to reallocate funding to address issues of broadband access in its rural communities when schools transitioned to online learning.

# HOW CABINETS ARE STAFFED

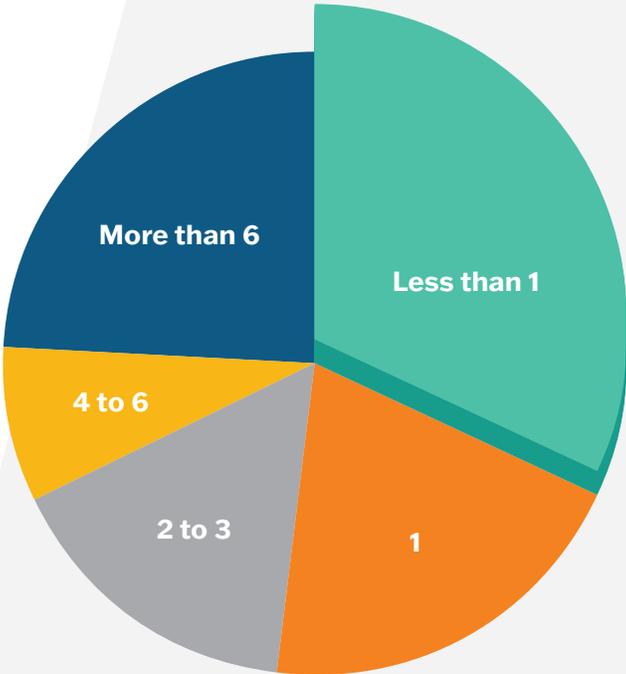
Over time, the Forum has noted a strong correlation between the success of a coordinating body and the stability of its support staff. Having at least one full-time staff member dedicated exclusively to the coordinating body correlates with its longevity.

Cabinets with small staff can be effective provided they have strong buy-in from members and the ability to leverage resources across stakeholders.

At the same time, as coordinating bodies invest in more full-time staff, they are often better positioned to support a broader scope of work beyond the fundamentals of policy alignment and coordination.

Of those who responded to this survey, 52% were executive directors of their coordinating bodies. Given funding realities, cabinets often have very lean staffing.

**CABINET STAFFING**

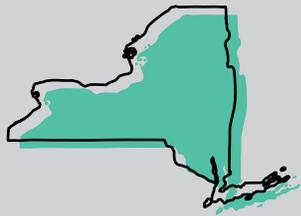


## CABINET MEMBERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

While K–12 education and human services agencies continue to be the most represented members of coordinating bodies, there has been a significant increase in membership from multiple government agencies since 2017. Membership is important because the issues affecting children, youth, and families are embedded throughout government, even beyond the “usual suspect” agencies such as education, health, housing, human services, labor, and juvenile justice. For example, a department of commerce may be highly effective in working with private industry on issues from childcare to workforce readiness while a department of transportation will have a major role in helping with transit options and accessibility support for families navigating across home, work, school, recreational, and other settings.

In addition to the leaders of public agencies or departments, many coordinating bodies also engage with a broad set of stakeholders from youth councils and statewide

nonprofits and foundations to state boards and institutions. By doing so, cabinets represent more perspectives and can achieve higher levels of cross-sector support. While we always encourage stakeholder engagement, managing communication and coordination across a greater number and diversity of stakeholders can require more capacity and take more time. It is essential to develop a series of best practices that facilitate efficient and effective engagement to ensure a clear set of shared expectations across stakeholders as well as meaningful progress on goals.



New York's State Early Childhood Advisory Council (NYSECAC) was able to secure a federal Preschool Development Birth through Five grant, which helped to advance and improve the lives of children and families.



With 10 active committees and task forces working with numerous other entities across the state, coordinating and facilitating these moving parts is one of the primary responsibilities of the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana (CISC). The CISC is an excellent example of a cabinet that has developed a framework that enables it to coordinate the movements of multiple entities at the same time.

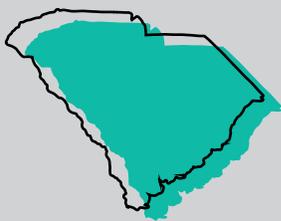
Written into CISC's enabling legislation is the inclusion of 18 commission members who coordinate more than 200 volunteers who serve on various task forces and committees. These stakeholders are committed to achieving the overarching goals put forth in the strategic plan, but they also work to achieve the objectives they have set for themselves.

# HOW CABINETS ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS, PARTICULARLY YOUTH AND FAMILIES

As coordinating bodies continue to engage more stakeholders, it is critical to ensure diversity of voice and to prioritize the two most important stakeholders in this work: young people and their families. We believe that prioritizing these two groups is an essential best practice that promotes equity and orients our systems and decision makers to the real-life needs of the people they are meant to serve—as decisions about young people and their families should not be made without young people and their families.

While engaging stakeholders is always critical, the methods that cabinets use to do so range across a spectrum. For example, **56 percent** of cabinets said they utilize focused surveys sent out to families, while **69 percent** of cabinets rely on engagement by way of making meetings open to the public.

As cabinets strive to grow in this area, we are looking forward to learning how cabinets work to effectively engage young people in other ways in the coming years.



South Carolina’s Early Childhood Council (SCECC) launched Palmetto Pre-K, a single public-facing portal featuring all publicly funded preschool options for three- and four-year-old children in South Carolina. This is the first collaborative effort of its kind in the state.

In 2020, more cabinets committed to identifying intentional methods to engage young people than did so in previous years of this survey. In addition to being apparent from engagement data from the survey, this increase was also evident in the Realizing the Opportunity for All Youth Learning Cohort convened by the Forum over the summer.

Thanks to generous funding from the Seattle Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this Learning Cohort brought together six cabinets—those of three states and three localities—to create policy change grounded in the science of youth development to promote equity and thriving for all adolescents. All the state cabinets focused on bringing young people’s voices and power into policymaking processes. Doing so was beneficial for the young people, meeting their needs for equity, agency, and identity development, and providing them with training and knowledge of government, approaches to interpreting data and evidence, and understanding of trauma-informed advocacy skills. But even more important, bringing young people and cabinet leaders together for substantive conversations is leading to better-informed and more effective policies.

Participating cabinets included the Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana, the Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development, the Maine Children’s Cabinet, the Reconnecting Los Angeles Youth Institute, the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, and the New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board.

To expand on this work going forward, the Forum is launching a 2021 Action Cohort that will create pathways for underrepresented youth to influence policy by generating their own rigorous evidence, thereby upsetting policymaking norms that disregard the tremendous gaps in understanding that can only be filled by lived experience and knowledge. Creating space and tools for young people to harness data, build on their lived experience, and have a direct voice in policymaking is a powerful approach to authentic youth engagement and effective policymaking.

# HOW CABINETS USE DATA AND EVIDENCE

Data and evidence play critical roles in understanding what children and youth are experiencing, how they are faring, and how well public systems are meeting their needs, guiding decisions both for the long term and in real time. They become especially important in identifying, describing, and working to overcome inequity, which can be insidious or difficult to muster the will to overcome. In addition to considering how data and evidence can already equip us to overcome inequity, we must also look at equity in the processes of generating and using data and evidence. The Forum looks at equity in these processes through the following three questions:

1. For, by, and about whom are data and evidence generated?
2. Who has a voice in how data and evidence get generated and used?
3. What information do we value enough to collect and consider—and who decides how it is valued?

## DATA

A coordinating body can add tremendous value by collecting and organizing agency data and creating an integrated data system with shared language among agencies. While the Forum recommends that coordinating bodies collect a variety of types of data, the types they often find most useful are fiscal data, performance measurement data, and child and youth indicator data. However, less than a quarter of respondents reported collecting all three types of data. Of the three-quarters of cabinets not using all three of these types of data, **92 percent** collected data on child and youth indicators, and **52 percent** collected performance measurement data and fiscal data.



In Minnesota, Governor Tim Waltz announced that the state had received a \$26.7 million federal grant to support critical early childhood services based on a listening tour conducted across 130 communities to collect feedback from stakeholders regarding how the funding should be allocated—the consensus was to commit the majority to bolstering systems that support families with young children.

In addition to collecting multiple types of data, the Forum recommends that agencies develop shared data language and a way for data to flow from one agency to another to improve services. Facilitating access to information across agencies is a critical but underutilized strategy that is necessary to effectively serve children and youth. Administrative hurdles are often cited as a major impediment to data sharing, and the collaborative infrastructure of children’s cabinets position them well to work through the technical and sometimes laborious process of securing effective data-sharing agreements. In 2017, state child and youth policy-coordinating bodies reported efforts to integrate data systems with child and youth information across agencies as a strategy to increase youth well-being in the past year. As of the 2019–2020 report, **36 percent** of cabinets are working to integrate data systems across agencies.

## EVIDENCE

Evidence-based programming can play an important role in helping young people attain positive outcomes and in using taxpayer dollars effectively. In addition, federal agencies are increasingly requiring states to use programs backed by a certain base level of evidence. Thirty-nine percent of coordinating bodies used formal evaluation policies and programming to verify a program’s evidence.

As important as evidence-based programs are, it is also important to continue expanding our understanding of how evidence can help to effectively serve children, youth, and families. As part of this expansion, the Forum makes a clear distinction between evidence-based programs and evidence-based practices, or “core components.” Core components are the parts, features, attributes, or characteristics of a program that research shows influence its success when implemented effectively—basically, the key “ingredients” in a program that really matter. Based on the local environment and its conditions, programs that are evidence-based may not always be a practical fit for a community, and the research backing an evidence-based program might be based on a target population with different characteristics that could affect outcomes.



The Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet was instrumental in implementing the state’s one-year Preschool Development Initial Grant and in helping to secure a follow-on \$27 million three-year renewal grant that will directly support early childhood programming and services for youth and families.

So what does a core components approach look like? An example would be the Standardization Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) that is used by the Iowa Department of Human Rights in its work to reform criminal justice practices that impact juveniles. The SPEP is a validated, data-driven rating instrument focused on reducing the recidivism of juvenile offenders. Drawing on a meta-analysis of more than 500 studies, the SPEP can be used to compare the key characteristics of a specific program with the characteristics the research shows to be associated with programs that are effective for reducing recidivism. As a result, the SPEP can help determine the effectiveness of name-brand programs and interventions as well as homegrown ones that may have been developed within a local community to meet its particular needs and circumstances.

Focusing on practices or core components is one way for policymakers to encourage the use of evidence to create effective interventions that fit local needs. By unpacking the individual aspects of programs that are working in general and are also working specifically for targeted populations or settings, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers together can help to create more nuanced tools, processes, or systems that suit local conditions. For more information, please see the Forum's work on [Advancing the Use of Core Components of Effective Programs](#).



# CABINET HIGHLIGHT

## MAINE GOVERNOR'S CHILDREN'S CABINET

### **Administrative Home**

The Children's Cabinet is a cross-agency effort that sits within the Executive Branch.

### **Staffing**

The Children's Cabinet has one full-time coordinator who sits in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. The coordinator works closely with high-level staff from each of the departments represented on the Cabinet.

### **Membership**

The Cabinet is composed of the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Education, Public Safety, and Correction. Currently, the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services serves as the chair of the Children's Cabinet.

### **Staff Meetings**

The staff meet twice per month and work together between Children's Cabinet meetings to coordinate and collaborate on cross-agency efforts.

### **Stakeholder Meetings**

The Children's Cabinet's work is informed by the Children's Cabinet Early Childhood Advisory Council, a group of early childhood stakeholders, which meets with agency staff monthly. The Maine Young People's Caucus, a diverse group of youth leaders from across Maine, advises the Children's Cabinet on strategies to support the healthy development of Maine youth.

### **Year Founded and Method of Establishment**

The Maine Children's Cabinet was founded in 1996 by Governor Angus King as a forum for state agencies to collaborate on policies for children and youth. The Cabinet was codified in Maine law in 2001. After an eight-year hiatus from 2010 to 2018, Governor Janet Mills reinstated the Children's Cabinet in spring 2019.

### **Duties/Responsibilities/Goals**

The Children's Cabinet has established two overarching goals for its work:

- All Maine children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.
- All Maine youth enter adulthood healthy and connected to the workforce and/or education.



# CABINET HIGHLIGHT (CONT'D)

## MAINE GOVERNOR'S CHILDREN'S CABINET

### Priority Initiatives

Initiatives include increasing screenings and referrals to needed services for young children. The cross-agency Early Intervention Workgroup of the Children's Cabinet is working to increase the rates of developmental screenings and referrals to needed early intervention and healthcare services for young children. The most recent project of the group is to increase the rates of developmental screenings by moving the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), a developmental screening tool, online. Providing access to the ASQ online for all professionals working with young children will improve access to screenings and ensure greater coordination.

### Increasing Evidence-Based Substance Use Disorder Treatment for Youth

The Children's Cabinet secured local grant funding to support a new coordinator position to work across state agencies to reach more youth with evidence-based substance use treatment and services to keep them healthy, stable, and connected to their families and communities. The staff member in this position is working with staff from state agencies and with community stakeholders to develop and implement a plan to fill existing gaps in services.

### Accomplishments

The Maine Governor's Children's Cabinet has strengthened relationships and communication across state agency leadership to implement key strategies within its strategic plans for young children and youth. Accomplishments include the following:

- Increasing access to infant and toddler care and improving the quality of childcare programming by providing a \$100 per week infant stipend through the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP), an increase in CCSP reimbursement for childcare programs participating in the Quality Rating System and providing care for infants and toddlers, and grants to support childcare programs to improve quality.
- Providing educators free online access to a trauma-informed, classroom-based, pre-K through 12th grade social-emotional learning curriculum. A cross-agency team, which includes staff from the state's Department of Education and its Department of Health and Human Services, has customized the materials to meet the diverse needs of Maine's student population and is supporting teachers to embed the curriculum into everyday academics.
- Strengthening behavioral services for youth in Maine by offering free certification training for Maine therapists from across the state in trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy and increasing stabilization services for youth in crisis and their families.

## **THE FORUM FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT**

The Forum for Youth Investment is a national nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” committed to changing the odds that all children and youth are ready for college, work, and life. It provides ideas, services, and networks that leaders need in order to make more intentional decisions that are good for young people. The Forum helps leaders increase their capacity to more effectively make the case for and manage the collaborative efforts that are needed to change the odds for youth; improve the alignment and appropriateness of child and youth policy agendas and investments; and strengthen programs’ and practitioners’ capacity to create environments in which youth thrive, across all the systems and settings where young people spend time.