

MEMO

To: Angela Sausser Short

From: Danielle Evennou and Lauren Sterling

CC: Elizabeth Gaines, Emily Jensen, Thad Ferber

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RE: Keep the Connections - Assessment and Recommendations

From Governor Celeste to Governor Strickland, the state of Ohio has had outstanding executive leadership around improving child and youth outcomes. The Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council (OFCF) and Family and Children First Councils (FCFC) should be acknowledged for their long list of achievements. These accomplishments include systems work, such as the development of common goals and indicators, youth in transition plan, state strategic plan and unique state/local shared accountability system, as well as, targeted work on the ground, like the *Help Me Grow* program.

The unrelenting dedication of First Lady Frances Strickland has been instrumental to raising the profile of OFCF in recent years. Undoubtedly, First Lady Strickland has been one of the OFCF Cabinet Council's great strengths. The Forum has found throughout its work with Children's Cabinets that this high level visibility and buy-in is essential to their effectiveness.

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 appendices.

The Forum looks forward to working with OFCF to strengthen its important, cutting-edge work in the coming year!

SUMMARY

- **Structure:** The OFCF Cabinet Council structure is unique in that there is a strong local connection through the FCFCs. The high level of involvement of the First Lady is a tremendous asset, but will present major challenges in the event of a gubernatorial transition. Additionally, the existence of an Early Childhood Cabinet presents an interesting opportunity to share capacity.
- **Goals:** The *Ohio Commitments to Child Well-being* and corresponding indicators, and the OFCF Cabinet Council's *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* outline a strong set of desired outcomes and strategies. Stronger connections need to be made between the local level impact (long-term) outcomes listed in the *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* and the *Commitments to Child Well-being* (work of FCFCs). The OFCF Cabinet Council plays an important role in providing the local FCFCs with technical assistance so that they can more effectively reach the state's goals.
- **Partnerships:** The Forum is excited about the OFCF Cabinet Council's plans to engage youth through an advisory council. Parental engagement work through the Family Engagement Committee is commendable. Business is a key sector that OFCF Cabinet Council should look to for future partnerships.
- **Data:** The *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* outlines great work for sharing cross-system indicators related to well being and sharing data across systems. The OFCF Cabinet Council needs to be able to use this data to demonstrate and track the short-term and long-term impact of their work.
- **Strategies:** There are many effective strategies enumerated in the *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan*. It is imperative that this plan continue moving beyond the impending expiration date. Generating corresponding local level action steps that tie to specific child and youth outcome areas can help boost the state's capacity for implementing the plan and help to clearly articulate how the *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* will impact child and youth outcomes. Clear communication to state government, FCFCs and the public is the key to promoting these efforts and assuring that they will continue.

COORDINATING BODY STRUCTURE

Forum recommendations:

Membership and Meetings:

The OFCF Cabinet Council has an outstanding membership structure that includes a broad range of state agencies that work on child and youth issues. It would benefit the OFCF Cabinet Council to bring Higher Education policy leaders to the table, especially given the OFCF's focus on youth and young adults in transition. Legislators are another group that could be more engaged in the work of the OFCF Cabinet Council. Ohio Revised Code 121.37 gives the state legislature a role in selecting members. This can boost their involvement and buy-in for the work of the OFCF Cabinet Council.

The OFCF's workgroups are a great way to accomplish detailed work, while keeping Cabinet Directors focused on decision making. Workgroups should have clear connections to the OFCF Cabinet Council directors. The workgroups themselves should not be redundant. For instance, there is a group tasked with working on flexible funding while another is working on grants. The workgroups should provide a seamless range of support for the OFCF Cabinet Council.

Meeting attendance among high level Cabinet Directors is very strong, but proper communication of the OFCF's work may not be happening within the individual member's agencies. Survey respondents indicated that knowledge related to the OFCF Cabinet Council does not always trickle down from agency heads/deputy directors to their respective staff. Likewise, respondents indicated that concerns of agency staff do not always bubble up to the OFCF Cabinet Council members.

The participation of First Lady Frances Strickland in the OFCF Cabinet Council has been a blessing. The Forum has found that the First Spouse model can be highly effective or less effective depending on the qualifications/personality of the individual in the First Spouse position. A multitude of survey respondents and interviewees communicated that First Lady Frances Strickland does a fabulous job as Chair of the Cabinet. On the flipside, the Forum has found that Children's Cabinets that are closely tied to an individual First Spouse present challenges in sustaining the work of the cabinet should a gubernatorial transition occur. An incoming administration may look to their Lieutenant Governor, First Spouse, or other state executives in the governor's office to serve in this role.

The Forum recognizes this as an area of high sensitivity when working to strengthen and sustain the work of the OFCF Cabinet Council in the coming year. The development of clear job descriptions and/or obtaining and updating the current job descriptions for the OFCF Chair and staff is a helpful, politically neutral step that will assist leaders in continuing this work.

Authority:

The OFCF Cabinet Council garners an effective level of authority because of its placement in the governor's office and the commitment of the First Lady, who regularly attends OFCF meetings, workgroup meetings, and even local FCFC meetings. Though she does not hold an official elected position, a First Lady still commands a great deal of respect.

Ohio Revised Code 121.37 lays out the wealth of responsibilities that fall under the Children's Cabinet. The codification of these roles and responsibilities is essential to strengthening the work of a Children's Cabinet and for maintaining its work for many administrations to come.

Resources:

The OFCF is a model for other states when it comes to providing the human resource support necessary to keep the work of the Children's Cabinet moving forward. The Children's Cabinet should be applauded for its use of pooled agency funds, which is a collaborative and creative approach to funding. While additional funding for the Children's Cabinet would be great, the dedicated line item funding of \$1.5 million, in addition to the almost \$500,000 in pooled funds, is remarkable compared to other states' Children's Cabinets. The Forum understands that this is money very well spent because the OFCF Cabinet Council brings state agencies together to work more efficiently (e.g. across silos) to address children's issues.

In addition to funding at the state level, investment must be made in the local FCFCs. Many survey respondents indicated that the level of funds given to the local FCFCs to carry out their work is "woefully inadequate." Additional funding or clear connections to local private funders and assistance with accessing federal dollars for this work would be helpful, as the capacity of local FCFCs varies depending on the size of the locality. Note this is a tension that the Forum has seen in Maryland where administrative funding for local management boards was severely cut this year

due to serious budget constraints. Please keep up the work of supporting the local FCFCs however you can. The technical assistance provided to local FCFC's by the state OFCF Cabinet Council helps to keep the work moving at the local level, especially in times when funding is scarce.

Local Connections:

Ohio is a model for states across the country for local connections. The inclusion of local councils/work in statute is a significant achievement. Ohio's state/local accountability structure is innovative and cutting-edge. FCFC survey respondents indicated that they would like additional information and training in their role working with the OFCF Cabinet Council. State and regional staff from the OFCF Cabinet Council are poised to provide such assistance. Though there are some existing communication tools provided to FCFCs, additional education and tools might be needed. In addition to connecting up to the OFCF Cabinet Council, finding a way for FCFCs to connect with each other around common goals is a great way to maximize the local coordinating body structure. These goals could tie to the OFCF *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* or *Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-Being*.

Stakeholder input:

"I think the involvement of the First Lady has had the biggest single impact."

"Keep working towards building local capacity for Family First Councils! We have been able to form great collaborations though the Council at the local level and it allows us a vehicle through which lots of information can flow."

"Mrs. Strickland's leadership style provides opportunity to learn of stakeholder issues and suggest solutions. Angela Sausser-Short and the regional OFCF team are effective in completion of tasks related to the Cabinet Councils priorities."

BIGGER GOALS

Forum recommendations:

Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-Being 2004 Indicator Manual sets up a comprehensive list of indicators to correspond with *Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-Being*, which are established in statute. These are a solid set of outcomes and corresponding indicators.

There is great shared accountability with state and local bodies both responsible for achieving *Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-Being*. Some local stakeholders wanted more education/information about their organization's role in this process, while others wanted more flexibility about reporting requirements. Overall, it is great that local bodies are being held accountable for the same set of indicators as the state OFCF. However, from the Forum's perspective, it is not effective for FCFCs to select only one of the six *Ohio Commitments to Child Well-being* to work on. Rather than trying to move one indicator at a time, the FCFCs should be working on a more comprehensive approach. Staff of the OFCF Cabinet Council can be instrumental in guiding local FCFCs to take a more big picture approach to improving outcomes for children and youth.

Another great example of bigger goals is the OFCF Cabinet Council's *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan*. While this is a great plan to align state processes, more clarity is needed in how it connects with *Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-being*. The Forum is happy to help facilitate a "contributing factors" process, by which the priorities, strategies, short- and long-term impacts of the plan can be better aligned with *Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-being* and the corresponding indicators. The Forum has also done extensive work in Massachusetts to develop a statewide action plan for youth in which local entities help to implement through identified strategies and action steps.

With multiple sets of goals, action plans, and strategies, it is of utmost importance to make clear the dominant framework. Once this is clarified, it may be easier to develop common language among agencies. The Forum suggests compiling the existing language used by agencies to track progress on improving child and youth outcomes. This can be done through a survey or with focus groups of agency staff. The information collected could be used as a starting off point to build a common language with joint ownership across state and local agencies.

Stakeholder input:

"Identify the common short-term and long-term goals they want to obtain and set a plan in place to do so."

"Identify priorities and goals of each agency Cabinet Council commonalities. Eliminate duplication. Coordinate policies and procedures and reduce bureaucratic paperwork."

"Not bold enough in pursuing transformative change. We need bold action steps not working around the edges."

BROADER PARTNERSHIPS

Forum recommendations:

External Partnerships:

The OFCF Cabinet Council has a great and unique structure for getting local input through the FCFCs, as well as, engaging parents through the Family Engagement Committee. The value of local input to the OFCF Cabinet Council is clear. It is particularly impressive that the Chair, First Lady Strickland, visited all 88 local FCFCs!

The advocacy sector is also very engaged. The Forum has found in some cases engaging advocates in Children's Cabinet work has been helpful, but it can also slow down the decision making process and make it difficult for agency heads to speak frankly about their work at meetings. Be sure to engage advocates in a way that is most advantageous to the OFCF Cabinet Council as a whole. The workgroups sound like a great place to gain the unique input of advocates.

The Forum is also very excited about the development of a Youth Advisory Council to the OFCF Cabinet Council and the existing engagement of youth in the Youth and Young Adults in Transition Steering Committee. The Forum manages a national network of such councils called America's Youth Councils Network, and has a wealth of resources and promising practices in this area. In the past, the Forum has worked closely with the Youth Advisory Committee of Cuyahoga County, which is highly effective in engaging youth in the policymaking process for issues that impact young people. The State of Maryland Youth Advisory Council is also a great model for connecting youth voice to both the governor's office and the state legislature in a formal way. The Forum is happy to assist the OFCF Cabinet Council in the creation of its youth council in any way possible.

While legislators are given the ability to select members of the Children's Cabinet, legislators themselves have not been as involved in the group's work as much as they could be. To strengthen its work and to help sustain itself for many gubernatorial administrations to come, the OFCF Cabinet Council should consider having legislators as members or developing a more formal way for this group to get involved with its work.

The OFCF grants workgroup's possible membership of the Ohio Grantmakers Forum is extremely promising in terms of funding. More work could be done to develop partnerships with private funders and the business sector.

Linked Initiatives:

On paper, there is a link between the work of the OFCF Cabinet Council and the Early Childhood Cabinet. The Early Childhood Cabinet has made great achievements in improving early childhood in the state. This work should be viewed in using a broader scope. It would be great to create a broader frame where the early childhood work was linked to the work the OFCF Cabinet Council is doing that focuses on older youth. It is critical to make a stronger link between these two groups.

The Forum recognizes the tension between these two groups, which was reflected in a number of survey responses. The Forum's "insulated education pipeline" is a great example of the continuum of supports young people need from birth to adulthood in order to be ready for college, work and life. If the OFCF Cabinet Council is seen more as an umbrella for all state child and youth efforts, rather than just connecting to the early childhood work, it may be easier to develop common goals and strategies. Legislation or executive order may be used to reposition the OFCF Cabinet Council in this way.

Stakeholder input:

"Be more inclusive of public and private partnerships."

"[OCFC Cabinet Council should be] expanded to higher education leaders (Chancellor to get on board)."

"Continued emphasis on parent engagement and involvement."

BETTER DATA

Forum recommendations:

OCFC Cabinet Council has a great results framework and set of indicators. While there is a lot of high quality data on children and youth in Ohio, it needs to be shared across agencies as well as tied to a common framework. If all agencies are working towards common outcomes, such as "Children and Youth Succeed in School," it will be easier to develop common language and definitions across agencies.

The *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* lists a number of key action steps to moving this data sharing work forward. "Collect and share-cross system indicators related to well-being" is a great strategy and should be tied to the existing *Ohio's Commitments to Child Well-being* and the corresponding indicators. Work to obtain local data from FCFCs is also important.

The *Better Lives, Better Ohio* website for sharing data by county is a big step in the right direction. It would be great to link this information more directly to the OFCF Cabinet Council website; making indicator data more accessible and expanding the newly developed website. The state OFCF Cabinet Council plays a vital role in providing executive decision makers with the culmination of local data on children and youth. The OFCF Cabinet Council can provide the governor with data to not only see the trajectory of specific localities, but also see how the kids are doing in the state as a whole.

Stakeholder input:

"Continue efforts to provide current state and county data to be utilized for county planning and outcome measurement."

"Develop a shared child outcome database so that legislators and others can access information across the child wellbeing indicators to check on how our children are doing. Ongoing--informing our elected officials of the state of children and their highest priorities."

BOLDER STRATEGIES

Forum recommendations:

Strategic Plan:

The OFCF Cabinet Council's *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* is a worthy action plan with cross-cutting approaches, e.g., cross-system alignment and flexible funding. It is paramount to keep this plan moving past its expiration date.

In terms of the local level/long-term impacts of this plan, it is very important to tie strategies and action steps to child and youth outcomes and indicators. The *Ohio Commitments to Child Well-being* and corresponding indicators should be used for this purpose. Though it takes a long period of time to show improvements in child and youth outcomes, without this connection it will be difficult to sustain the buy-in needed to fully implement the plan overtime.

On a side note, there is basic language in the longer action plan that does not line up with the one page document on the plan, e.g., "state level outcomes" versus "state level impact."

A lot of the concerns that came up in the survey are addressed in the strategic plan such as joint requests for proposal, flexible funding, and wanting integrated data. Some of the action steps associated with strategic plan require ongoing work. In other cases, there is a more specific timeline to take the action steps listed in the plan. Either way, it is clear that additional steps will have to be taken past FY 2011 in order to achieve the desired outputs and ensure that the plan continues in the future.

Policy and Resource Alignment:

It is clear from the strategic plan that policy and resource alignment is a priority of the OFCF Cabinet Council. There are currently two workgroups that work in this area, one focused on flexible funding and another on grants. The Forum is curious about why these workgroups exist separately and not as a combined entity.

It is important to track the progress of the steps in the *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan* that relate to aligning policies. The surveys and interviews indicate that people, particularly at the local level, are very interested in more flexible funding. Relationships with outside funders, as well as, federal policymakers are important to helping make sure that funds coming into the state for child and youth issues can be used in the most collaborative way possible.

The Forum understands that the OFCF Cabinet Councils is taking steps to provide more flexible funding structure so that local entities can make better use of existing funds to support their work to improve child and youth outcomes. The state's work to provide more flexible funding streams to address child and youth issues is extremely valuable to local entities.

Quality Improvement:

Quality improvement is one of the few areas that the OFCF Cabinet Council has not undertaken. The Forum's partner, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (the Center), is a national leader in assessing and improving the quality of youth programs. In addition to afterschool programs, the Center is developing tools for other settings, such as juvenile justice systems and early childhood settings.

The local FCFC structure would be very useful in implementing program quality work. The state of Maryland has done this with their Local Management Boards, by requiring that programs funded by the state's children's trust fund have a quality evaluation component. The Forum is eager to facilitate connections needed to help bring more systematic youth program quality work to Ohio.

Public Messaging:

Public messaging is of utmost significance to strengthening the work of the OFCF Cabinet Council and continuing to move it forward. There are so many great things going on in Ohio as illustrated in the *SFY 2010-2011 Action Plan*, *Ohio's Commitments Child Well-being*, and *Youth and Young Adults in Transition Report*. The trick is to communicate clear messages about what the OFCF Cabinet Council is doing and how it has made progress toward improving outcomes for children and youth. The *Better Lives, Better Ohio* website is one example of a communications mechanism to demonstrate improvements in child and youth outcomes using data.

Forum staff had some difficulty navigating the various plans and frameworks of the Children's Cabinet of the OFCF Cabinet Councils' current website. Not only do the various goals and projects need to be communicated between the OFCF and FCFCs, but also through staff at state and local agencies, as well as, the youth serving community and the public.

The Forum is worked with SpitFire strategies to help develop effective messaging for Children's Cabinets and looks forward to developing messages to help communicate value and effectiveness the OFCF Cabinet Council. Both the state OFCF Cabinet Council and the local FCFCs should use common messaging when articulating the value of their work. The [OFCF brochure](#) is a tool that communicates both the value of OFCF Cabinet Council as well as the FCFCs.

Stakeholder input:

Strategic Plan:

"The Cabinet should lead in building a statewide agenda for children that can weather changes in political party leadership."

Policy and Resource Alignment:

"Budget reductions due to the recession have been severe across all line items impacting all populations. There is difficulty in pooling federal /state dollars at the local level. FCFCs complain about too many fiscal audits and duplication in regulation that are required by different entities/different funding streams; previous difficulty with CMS regarding approval for a bundled rate for intensive home-based treatment. 'Home-Rule' in Ohio continues to assure lack of evenness across the state regarding services, access, and simply put....the way the local FCFCs chose to do business. Lack of resource (monetary) however, has been the greatest impediment."

Quality Improvement:

"Program is administered differently in 88 counties, making quality control, evaluation and measuring difficult."

Public Messaging:

"The OFCFC is not recognized by many people outside of local councils. Publicity on the council and what is hoping to accomplish would increase buy in from agencies and public sector."