

Building Data and Research Capacity to Improve Child Care Access in Alabama: Project Summary

The University of Alabama Early Education Research Office
and the Alabama Department of Human Resources

Project Overview

This 18-month planning project, a partnership between The University of Alabama (UA) and the Alabama Department of Human Resources (ADHR), aims to strengthen Alabama's capacity to use data and research to improve child care and early education (CCEE) policies and practices.

This project is funded through the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the Administration of Children and Families within Health and Human Services. The project runs from October 2024 through March 2026.

Alabama was one of five states awarded this competitive grant. It may be followed by a more comprehensive implementation research project.

Key Project Goals

- **Enhance Data-Driven Decision Making:** Build ADHR's ability to collect, analyze, and use data to inform decisions about child care policies, the subsidy program, and quality initiatives.
- **Address Critical Research Questions:** Conduct preliminary analyses and develop a comprehensive research plan to address key questions related to CCEE access in Alabama, including:
 - What opportunities exist to build data and research capacity within ADHR?
 - What is the current demand for CCEE in Alabama, and how does it vary across the state?
 - For what reasons do some families choose not to participate in the workforce, and to what extent are these related to CCEE access?
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** Foster a strong, collaborative research-practice relationship between UA and ADHR and engage other key stakeholders across the state.
- **Prepare for Future Research:** Develop a competitive research plan for a Phase II project to implement evidence-based strategies for improving CCEE access and quality in Alabama.

How This Project Benefits Alabama

- **Improved CCEE Policies:** By strengthening ADHR's data and research capacity, this project will lead to more informed and effective CCEE policies that better meet the needs of Alabama's children and families.
- **Increased CCEE Access:** The project will identify barriers to CCEE access and develop strategies to expand access, particularly for underserved populations.
- **Enhanced Workforce Development:** By addressing child care challenges, this project will support workforce participation and economic growth in Alabama.
- **Informed Use of Resources:** The project will help ADHR make more strategic and data-driven decisions about allocating resources for CCEE programs and services.
- **Alignment with State Priorities:** This project aligns with Alabama's efforts to meet the 2024 CCDF Final Rule requirements and improve the overall quality of early childhood education in the state.

Selected Project Activities

- Conducting a self-assessment of ADHR's data and research capacity.
- Analyzing existing administrative data on CCEE licensing, subsidies, and quality.
- Mapping CCEE access across the state, focusing on identifying child care deserts.
- Developing a logic model and research plan for Phase II.

Expected Outcomes

- A comprehensive research plan for Phase II.
- Increased data and research capacity within ADHR.
- Improved understanding of CCEE access challenges and opportunities in Alabama.
- Stronger partnerships among key stakeholders.
- Actionable data to inform CCEE policies and practices.

This project represents a significant investment in child care and early education in Alabama, moving us towards ensuring that all children have access to high-quality early care and education that supports their development and prepares them for success.

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