

Final Report – Wyoming Early Childhood Governance Task Force

The Wyoming Early Childhood Governance Task Force was appointed to recommend an early childhood governance structure for the state, including appropriate roles for both state government and community leaders. One of the most challenging issues embedded in this work is the possibility of creating a new governance approach within state government’s executive branch, which would require moving programs among agencies.

The Task Force has reached a broad consensus that the state should consolidate programs into the Department of Education and the Department of Family Services. The Task Force has recommended moving special education services and the Head Start Collaboration office into the Department of Education, while moving Quality Counts and leadership for home visiting into the Department of Family Services. This final report provides background on how the Task Force arrived at this conclusion, and summarizes important next steps.

I. The Existing State Landscape of Early Childhood Governance

Programs serving young children are currently managed by four different agencies. The programs involved include the following (all data taken from the Needs Assessment produced by the Glen Price Group as part of the Preschool Development Grant-Birth through Five (PDG-B5) grant):

Service	Infant-Toddler	3-5 year olds
Child Care	Child care subsidies (Federal: \$8,201,097 Child care development fund, \$230,801 Temporary Assistance to Needy Families; State general fund: \$5,431,484)	
	Child care licensing	
	Technical assistance for child care providers	
Home visiting	Parents as Teachers (Federal: \$1,395,116)	
	Healthy Baby Home Visiting (Federal: \$1,202,341)	
Head Start	Head Start, Early Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start (Federal: \$24,308,720)	
	Head Start Collaboration office	
IDEA (Special education)	Part C (Federal: \$1,673,121; State general fund: \$10,562,373)	Part B (Federal: \$1,510,146; State general fund: \$21,148,187)
	Preschool	District preschool (State general fund: \$813,535; State special revenue: \$502,190; Wyoming enterprise fund: \$148,567) TANF preschool (Federal: \$1,824,820)
Quality Counts	State-funded initiative to provide information to parents and providers	

	Department of Education
	Department of Family Services
	Department of Health
	Department of Workforce Services
	Not managed by a state agency ¹

¹ Head Start funding is always provided directly by the federal government to providers without direct state oversight. In most states funds through the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) are

In a 2018 national report by the Bipartisan Policy Center about the efficiency of early childhood governance systems, [Wyoming was ranked 49th](#). The frustration experienced by leaders of the system prompted the creation of the Task Force as part of the state's federally-funded PDG-B5 grant. This one-year grant has been used by the state to develop an overall strategic plan for early childhood, including stronger approaches to engaging families and a new definition of quality. The grant also supported the development of a needs assessment, from which the above agency data was drawn. The state is currently applying for a three-year renewal grant, and the results of that application will be announced later this year.

While the Department of Education is listed as the lead agency for funds distributed by the federal government under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – as required by the Act itself – the actual administration of funds involves a collaborative arrangement with the Department of Health. Part B funds serve children ages 3-5, and Part C funds serve children birth to three. At the local level IDEA funds are administered by both school districts and community development agencies.

II. Key Principles in Designing a State Agency Structure

The Task Force has articulated some key principles for the state's early childhood governance:

- *The system needs to be more coherent.* There is a strong belief that the state can do better than the current configuration.
- *The system needs high-level leadership.* The Task Force would like to see the creation of a state-level post that provides systemwide leadership for the early childhood field, as a full-time responsibility. In a handful of states early childhood is managed in a standalone agency, and the head of that agency serves in this role; in some other states early childhood programs have been consolidated within a larger agency, and a senior deputy is responsible for overseeing those programs.
- *Greater policy clarity.* The larger strategic planning process is working to develop recommendations on Wyoming early childhood policy; the Governance Task Force is focused on developing a plan to oversee that ongoing policy work.
- *Better information for parents.* A substantial focus of Wyoming's overall strategic planning effort is to provide better information for parents, and a new governance arrangement should include a strong focus on ensuring that parents have what they need to be successful.
- *The infrastructure needed to actually deliver quality and increase access.* Simply put, Wyoming's early childhood providers are more likely to be successful if they have additional support. The Task Force acknowledges that the current state budget situation makes it unlikely that such support will be provided in the immediate future, but its work can serve as a roadmap for developing the capacity to provide that support.

The Task Force also discussed some of the core functions that a governance structure needs to be able to perform, and highlighted four areas that it sees as a priority (not listed in priority order): (1) Money management, (2) Engaging and supporting families, (3) Supporting professionals, and (4) Communicating about early childhood development, and the system. In its discussions the Task Force discussed the

managed by a state agency; however, Wyoming chose not to apply for MIECHV funds, so the state's Parents as Teachers program is operated by the national Parents as Teachers center. Wyoming could in the future choose to apply for these home visiting funds directly.

respective role of state government and local communities, seeking to strike an appropriate balance in the Wyoming context. The Task Force would like to see the state focus on the following capacities in designing a system that can succeed at those core functions, as described below.

Money Management

- The state should bring together multiple programs into the same agency, and then that centralized authority should work to align the existing programs into a more coherent whole. This includes an integrated approach to planning an overall budget, and potentially changing the implementation of existing funding streams to make them work together more effectively. In doing so the state should be focused on the needs of families, and how state funding can be best designed to serve family needs.
 - These funding streams currently have requirements that are in tension or even conflicting, and resolving those issues will make it easier for providers to implement the funds.
 - Even individual funding streams can have multiple purposes – for example, child care is both a developmental support and a work support. The new agency structure should allow the state to take a more holistic approach to harmonizing these different values.
- The state should provide some amount of direct assistance to providers to help them understand what funds they might be able to access, and how they can utilize those funds effectively. Many providers do not have the capacity or expertise to manage complex finances, and more assistance is needed.
 - The state should also develop a network of regional supports available to providers on a voluntary basis, which can include numerous business and financial management services. Similar models have been developed in other states, and are often a cost-effective way for providers to manage their finances effectively while minimizing the burden on programmatic staff.
 - These regional support networks should also communicate back to the state about common problems providers are facing, so that when possible the state can make changes to resolve those problems.
 - These regional networks can help both schools and private providers. This can include private providers who are not receiving public subsidies; for them this would be in effect a small business support.
 - The Task Force noted that the regional support staff need not be state employees – they could be contracted or part of an intermediary. The best approach can be determined by the oversight agency.

Engaging and supporting families

- The Task Force wants the state to build off of existing resources to create a single website/application accessible to parents statewide that provides information about available services. This website should help them understand what services are available, and then help them access those services.
 - Currently the state does provide information about different programs, and those efforts should be brought together into a single hub.
 - A single statewide system will be particularly useful for high-mobility families.
- While a single statewide point of access is useful, for many families the most important form of engagement will be personal interaction with a trusted professional in their community; this should

include child care providers, home visitors, school district point people, and more. The state should provide ongoing support to these community-level ambassadors to help parents navigate the system. State involvement is needed to support equity, as some communities will not have adequate resources to provide this navigational help without state support.

- Maintaining networks of this kind is difficult, and will require focused and skilled capacity to execute well.

Supporting professionals

- The state will need to hold a definition of quality that informs a system of professional supports.
- The state has been developing professional learning collaboratives (PLCs), which are seen as a strong base to build on. These PLCs engage providers and then provide professional development based on their needs, and also help to connect families to resources.
 - The Task Force would like to see additional capacity provided to regional efforts to establish PLCs. So far limited staff capacity has put a ceiling on the reach of the PLCs.
- In addition to the PLCs, the state should take the lead on improving pre-service training.
- Apprenticeships can play a role in building the capacity of the workforce.
- Different programs in the state currently have different requirements for professional development – placing a burden on providers trying to navigate a complex system, and meaning that some professional development is approved for credit in some systems but not others. The state should take the lead in harmonizing those requirements, working closely with providers to do so.
- The Task Force noted that one important form of support for professionals is improved pay. Indeed, without improved pay all other professional development efforts are likely to have a minimal impact on the field, as any professionals who are able will seek to apply their improved training in higher-paying jobs. The Task Force recognizes the limitations of available funds but its conversation did emphasize the importance of professional salaries.

Communicating about early childhood development, and the system

- The Task Force believes strongly that communication about early childhood development – and the services Wyoming provides to support it – must be multi-directional; the state should listen to providers and families, in addition to communicating outward to them. Because the early childhood field involves a wide range of stakeholders and a host of different issues, this multi-directional communication is key – and while require dedicated and skilled capacity to manage.
- The Task Force believes that having a high-level leader will be important to a communication strategy, particularly with regard to certain audiences (including policymakers).

In sum, the new lead agencies will need to be adept at providing supports to families and providers – including having the capacity to manage regional networks; skilled at reaching out to constituents and hearing from them about their issues, then having processes to address those issues; capable of communicating outward in a clear and consistent manner; willing to engage in the sometimes difficult work of providing consistency across multiple funding streams; and sensitive to state/regional/local dynamics, which must be managed on an ongoing basis – with an eye toward empowering local actors wherever possible. The PDG-B5 renewal grant represents a unique opportunity to begin developing a state agency structure with those capacities, given the likely limitations on state funds in the immediate future.

III. Key Considerations in Designing an Agency Structure

After identifying its key principles and priorities, the Task Force identified some potential pros and cons of different approaches to state agency governance. For purposes of the discussion, the Task Force made reference to a taxonomy of state agency approaches identified by the BUILD Initiative in 2013²:

- Coordinated governance: Responsibility for oversight of early childhood programs is dispersed among multiple agencies (Wyoming’s current state).
- Consolidation: Responsibility for oversight of early childhood programs is consolidated into one or more existing agencies that also have other responsibilities.
- Creation: Responsibility for oversight of early childhood programs is brought together into a single agency solely focused on early childhood.

In its September 23 meeting the Task Force identified pros and cons of these different approaches.

A. Coordinated Governance

The Task Force discussed coordinated governance as representing the status quo. On September 23 the Governor’s Office explained that it launched the Task Force because it believes that the status quo is not optimal. That statement was consistent with other conversations the Task Force has had to date, and sentiments expressed in the strategic planning process. Nonetheless, the Task Force identified some specific pros and cons of maintaining the status quo.

Pros	Cons
This is a difficult time for state government, and change may be hard given the current circumstances.	Having too many agencies involved is complicated for legislators, parents, providers, and the public
Suggesting changes at this time may call attention to programs in ways that may be harmful.	The dispersed oversight leads to inefficiency in the administration of programs, and a lack of leadership
It may be possible to make improvements within the current structure.	

B. Consolidation

The Task Force discussed pros and cons of consolidating functions into an existing agency. Importantly, consolidation does not require moving all functions into a single agency; even if the state chooses to consolidate it can move some programmatic authority while other authority remains unchanged.

Pros	Cons
Creating more efficient use of the tens of millions of dollars Wyoming spends on early childhood.	Would require statutory change, which could be difficult politically.

² Regenstein, E. and Lipper, K. (May 2013) *A Framework for Choosing a State-Level Early Childhood Governance System*. BUILD Initiative. Retrieved from: <https://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Early%20Childhood%20Governance%20for%20Web.pdf>

Pros	Cons
Making it easier for providers to deliver service, with more consistent rules and oversight – and expertise in the entire field, not just individual programs.	There is scar tissue at multiple agencies from previous efforts to consolidate programs.
The potential to create a high-level leader within an agency who can provide consistent communication, including to parents.	The potential for ECE to get lost within an agency if its leadership is not sufficiently high-ranking.
Having a single oversight agency could create consistency in policy and planning in a way that is easier for providers and other stakeholders.	Having decisions on funding centralized could make it challenging for some stakeholders and put them at a disadvantage in dealing with the state.
Less costly than creating a new agency, as it can take advantage of existing infrastructure.	There are costs to managing a transition, and even if money can be found to manage those costs it will cause disruption in existing agencies and the field.
Provides a potential opportunity for meaningful improvement in service delivery.	Does not guarantee meaningful improvement in service delivery.

While many of the comments were about consolidation generally, there were some comments that were specific to particular agency scenarios. These included:

- The issue of creating a birth-through-high school continuum – which would likely have to be housed at the Department of Education – or a separate birth-to-five lead agency that would then work with the Department of Education on that continuum.
- Concerns were raised about moving early childhood functions into the Department of Education, given the Department’s statutory mission and primary constituent base. The Department of Education works primarily with K-12 schools, and the early childhood field includes many other kinds of providers.
- One Task Force member noted that each agency has a very different culture and charge, which would impact how it would approach early childhood if it were given new responsibilities.
- One Task Force member noted that the Department of Family Services currently has numerous early childhood programs, and that moving additional functions to DFS might reduce the number of moving parts.

Task Force members noted that if a proposal were to be brought to the legislature it would need to have a clear rationale, which could be grounded in the Task Force’s priorities and functions (and other priorities identified through the strategic plan).

C. Creation

Five states have created a standalone agency focused on early childhood. The Task Force identified the pros and cons this possibility as well.

Pros	Cons
Would elevate the subject of early childhood, and avoid issues relating to how early childhood fits within a larger agency construct.	Would require statutory change, which would be difficult politically. Indeed, several Task Force members indicated they did not believe the Legislature would be willing to support the creation of a new agency for early childhood – and if these members are correct, it would mean that this strategy is not viable at this time.
Would be positioned to set coherent policy and provide clear leadership and communication on early childhood subjects.	Would require substantial new administrative capacity, and would involve a more complicated transition than the consolidation of functions into an existing agency.

IV. The Task Force’s Recommendations for Governance Changes

At its October 9 meeting, the Task Force made recommendations about the direction the state should pursue:

- A substantial majority of the Task Force would like to change the state’s early childhood governance at some point in the coming years.
- A majority of the Task Force would like to consolidate functions into an existing state agency. Other members could support the creation of a new agency, but several of those Task Force members indicated that they could also support consolidation under the right circumstances.
- The Task Force was asked to make recommendations for which agencies should have their role expanded in the event the state decides to consolidate functions into existing agencies. A strong majority of members indicated that the Department of Family Services and Department of Education should take on new responsibilities.

These recommendations represent a consensus of the Task Force, if not an entirely unanimous opinion. Importantly, the Task Force agreed that functions should not be moved across agencies unless it will lead to meaningful changes in how programs operate and how the state provides leadership. Some key ideas that were raised in the Task Force’s discussion, which should inform the work going forward:

- Multiple Task Force members reiterated their belief that the legislature would not support creation at this time.
- Members who support moving functions into the Department of Family Services generally indicated that they believe that the Department’s focus on family strengthening is a key lens that should be applied to any early childhood programs it oversees. Similarly, members who support moving functions into the Department of Education appreciate WDE’s emphasis on learning and development, and it’s connection to K-12 – which should be brought to bear on any new responsibilities in early childhood. While the Task Force’s discussion focused primarily on potential changes to oversight of publicly-funded services, the Task Force wanted to acknowledge that the work already being done by DFS and WDE on their existing early

childhood functions were an important factor in the Task Force’s recommendation that they be given additional responsibilities.

- Indeed, the Task Force discussed how each agency brings a particular set of strengths to its work – and that any agency taking on new responsibilities should be respectful of the strengths and viewpoints of other agencies, so that when a new structure is built it brings a broader viewpoint that encompasses what had been the lenses of multiple agencies.
- Advocates for creation of a new agency generally emphasized their belief that a standalone agency would allow for a fresh start and new mentality. They indicated that they hoped this same approach could be brought to an effort to consolidate. This would likely require new leadership with a broad systems focus and the ability to create a more unified culture.
- Some Task Force members indicated that consolidating into two agencies could have advantages, whereas others believed it would be most effective to consolidate into one.

On October 23, the Task Force continued its conversation by discussing four major program areas currently housed at the Department of Health and the Department of Workforce Services, with the goal of making recommendations for where those program areas would fit best. Based on the October 23 discussion – and further discussion at its December 4 meeting -- the Task Force came to the following recommendations:

- *The Approach to Transition.* The Task Force recognizes that making the changes it recommends will take work. Accordingly, as discussed further below, the Task Force recommends that the process of transition involve an accessible and accountable process that engages affected stakeholders, and gives the public the opportunity to weigh in on the specifics of the oversight transitions. This process of engagement should continue once the programs have moved to their new agency homes.
- *Quality Counts:* The Task Force reached consensus that Quality Counts should be moved to the Department of Family Services. Because DFS already funds child care and has a leadership role in supporting child care professionals, it makes sense to bring the work of Quality Counts to DFS – which will hopefully lead to improved support for providers and better information for families. Task Force members expressed the hope that this will help streamline professional development opportunities.
 - The Task Force noted that there is a companion program at the Department of Workforce Services – an [unemployment insurance trust fund](#) – and that the move should be designed to minimize any negative impact on the oversight of that trust fund.
- *Home visiting:* A clear majority of the Task Force recommended that home visiting leadership be vested in the Department of Family Services. In doing so, the Task Force would like to see the DFS establish a more coherent menu of voluntary home visiting options and provide the leadership needed to ensure that families are able to access the services that best meet their needs. This will require thinking broadly about existing models and coordinating among them.
 - In coordinating among models DFS will need to examine outcomes of those different home visiting models.
 - The Task Force noted some of the benefits to home visiting of having a focus on family and community health, which members would like to see preserved within the state’s home visiting program under DFS’ leadership. WDH explained that home visiting includes maternal health before, during, and after pregnancy, in addition to services for young children.

- The Task Force recommends that DFS consider how home visiting can be strengthened by partnerships with other programs, including child welfare.
- Task Force members also emphasized that the cross-disciplinary nature of home visiting will mean that coordination between DFS and other agencies will be important to the success of the field. The Task Force noted that there are services that have an in-home component that are not defined as home visiting services, and that DFS' efforts to develop a coherent approach to home visiting should take account of those services as well.
- The Task Force acknowledges that Public Health Nurses will remain at the Department of Health, and recommends that DFS work with the Department of Health in defining the role of Public Health Nurses within the improved home visiting system.
- *IDEA/Special Education*: The Task Force recommends that IDEA functions be consolidated into the Wyoming Department of Education, including both Part B (3-5 year olds) and Part C (0-3 year olds). An initial vote of the Task Force on October 23 showed a clear majority supporting this change. At a final vote at the close of the Task Force's December 4 meeting, an overwhelming majority of voting Task Force members supported a move of Part B to WDE, and all Task Force members who voted recommended that Part C be moved to WDE.
 - The Department of Education acknowledged at the October 9 meeting that there are substantial gaps in the existing system. It indicated that it is ready to work with other stakeholders to come up with an approach to special education that is best for children. At the December 4 meeting it provided additional information about IDEA oversight and Wyoming's engagement with the federal Office of Special Education Programs. Also on December 4, Jaime Stine gave a presentation articulating the concerns of a majority of CDCs and raising some questions for the Task Force to consider.
 - Following the October 23 meeting, seven Child Development Center directors from regions around the state wrote to the Task Force regarding the Task Force's emerging recommendations. While the specifics of the letters varied, all of them expressed opposition to moving IDEA functions to the Department of Education. All of them also expressed that if a move were to occur the preferred destination would be the Department of Family Services. Some of the letters indicated a preference for remaining at the Department of Health. These letters were circulated to the Task Force on November 9. Between November 9 and the December 4 meeting the Task Force received letters from additional stakeholders offering varying perspectives, including another letter from a CDC opposed to the recommendations; two letters from CDCs in favor of the recommendations; two additional letters opposing some portion of the recommendations -- one of which asked for all services to be consolidated under DFS, and the other objected to the proposed move of home visiting services to DFS; four letters specifically supportive of the idea of moving special education services to the WDE; and one letter expressing concern with the CDCs' advocacy approach and proposing a task force to study Part B and C funding. All of these letters were shared with Task Force members prior to the December 4 meeting.
 - Importantly, the Task Force's recommendation speaks only to a change in oversight at the state level; the Task Force did not make recommendations regarding the

relationship between school districts and Child Development Centers. The Task Force would like to see this issue addressed as part of the transition planning to having IDEA services at the Department of Education. Specifically, the Task Force would like to see WDE, CDCs, and school districts work together to establish requirements for transparency and public engagement that would govern the process of changing the approach to delivery in any community. The Task Force believes communities potentially impacted by changes in WDE's approach –or by any proposed shift in service delivery – should have the opportunity to weigh in before any final decisions are reached.

- WDE and the Department of Health informed the Task Force at its December 4 meeting that their position is that under current Wyoming law, the state has the power to award early childhood IDEA funds to either regional developmental preschools or other appropriate institutions.³ This would be expected to remain true if oversight responsibility is consolidated into WDE, and the recommendation above speaks to how the Task Force would like WDE to go about exercising that power.
- WDE also indicated in the December 4 meeting that it contacted OSEP to ask about the method by which it could contract with CDCs. Currently CDCs are able to enter into a single contract with the state and are not required to contract with each individual school district in its region. WDE represented to the Task Force that it had confirmed with OSEP that this approach could continue if WDE assumed sole oversight responsibilities over IDEA.
- The Task Force recommends that WDE remain in close contact with OSEP as a key part of a successful transition of IDEA functions.
- As part of the larger strategic planning work the state is studying how it manages important transitions for children and families in the early childhood years; the transition from Part C special education to Part B is one of those transitions.
- Under the IDEA statute, [20 U.S.C. §1435\(a\)\(10\)](#), any change in the designation of the lead Part C agency requires the Governor to notify the federal government of that change.
- *Head Start Collaboration Office*: The Task Force was initially relatively evenly divided on the question of whether the Collaboration office should be moved to the Department of Family Services or the Department of Education. At the time the Task Force was polled on this issue on October 23, the Task Force had not yet made a recommendation for where the state's IDEA functions would be placed. After the meeting, Quentin Rinker – representing the Head Start Association – expressed a preference that the Collaboration office be moved to the same agency as IDEA, which in this case would be the Department of Education. Task Force members were offered the opportunity to propose alternate approaches, and none did. The final consensus of the Task Force was that the Collaboration office should be moved to WDE.

Importantly, the Task Force recognized that simply moving programs to a new agency home does not automatically improve them. The receiving agencies will need to establish new leadership structures to

³ This definition of eligible providers comes from Wyo. Stat. Ann. § 21-2-703(b)(i). This language is part of Wyoming Statutes Title I, Chapter 2, Article 7, which governs services to preschool children with disabilities. Additional state responsibilities in distributing funds are included in § 21-2-705 and § 21-2-706. The Child Development Centers are considered regional developmental preschools under the statutory definition.

oversee the combined operations, and spend focused energy on harmonizing the programs – and seeing that the results are communicated to policymakers, practitioners, and families. The Task Force recognizes that it will take some time for that work to bear fruit, but believes it is worth it to create a more effective system on an ongoing basis.

V. The Work Ahead

The level of consensus achieved by the Task Force represents an unprecedented level of progress on the issue of early childhood governance for Wyoming. But it is clear that there are important substantive issues that remain unresolved.

A. The State’s Relationship with Regional and Community Infrastructure

One topic that will need further exploration is the relationship of the newly-consolidated structure with regional and local infrastructure. The Task Force has identified several important regional and local activities to support the new governance approach in executing the prioritized core functions:

- Identifying and addressing gaps in service in rural areas;
- Regional support networks to help providers with their financial management;
- Local engagement for families to help them navigate the system and access the services they need; and
- Professional learning collaboratives to engage professionals.

In the long run the state will need to resolve all of these issues and create durable structures to ensure that functions are well-executed. In the short term, the state will need to determine how much clarity it needs on these issues before moving forward toward a new agency structure. These issues can and should be addressed in the course of transition planning and the early years of a new agency.

B. The Nature of Interagency Collaboration

As required by the federal Head Start law, Wyoming maintains an Early Childhood State Advisory Council. Whatever changes are made to Wyoming’s administration of its early childhood programs, the Council could serve as a valuable forum for continued collaboration (a) among state agencies, and (b) between state government and its outside partners. A change in governance could require rethinking the Council’s role and agenda, and considering what value it might have in a reconfigured landscape.

The state will also need to consider what other structures it might want for interagency collaboration. These can be informal, and should not necessarily be created formally as part of a reorganization. Some states have established collaborative structures for leaders inside government to work together, and Wyoming may want to consider doing the same – particularly as the consolidation process should lead to both Family Services and Education playing significant roles in early childhood.

The state’s emerging shift to having two lead agencies will require substantial coordination between those two agencies. It will also be important for each agency to incorporate the values of the other into its work, so that the field does not perceive an artificial divide between “education” and “care.” The child care programs administered at the Department of Family Services have an educational component, and the preschool programs administered at the Department of Education provide care and engage families; ongoing collaboration between these two agencies will be needed to reinforce these shared values.

C. Data Capacity

In many ways the most challenging aspect of establishing a state's data infrastructure is data governance – and that the issue of data governance is logically addressed in the transition from one overall governance structure to another. If programs are consolidated into one or two agencies, that is an excellent opportunity to look further at how data should be managed to help improve child and family outcomes.

Importantly, better data use will require more than improved data production – it will also require the capacity to analyze and report on data. In too many states data isn't all that meaningful to the people collecting and reporting it, and there is limited capacity to make sense of the data produced. The process of planning for a new agency structure should include attention to developing this kind of capacity, with the recognition that analytic capacity need not sit in the lead agency itself; while that approach has merit, the state can also consider housing capacity at outside partners or in higher education.

In the renewal grant the state's approach will be to seek the establishment of shared data infrastructure that can rapidly produce useful information for Wyoming policymakers, particularly leaders at DFS and WDE. This infrastructure will be cloud-based and will leverage data sources Wyoming already has available.

The shared infrastructure will be designed so that it can be easily expandable – and the state will engage with communities and providers to learn more about how they would like to use data infrastructure, so that additional use capacity can be built out over time. Once the state's new governance approach is finalized, the agencies with oversight of key programs will need to enter into an overarching interagency agreement that provides a framework for data utilization that allows the state to produce data in a rapid and reliable manner to inform decision-making – while strictly protecting data privacy and security. Each participant in the integrated data system will then have an individualized memorandum of understanding spelling out the terms of its participation.

D. The Timing and Schedule of Any Change

The Task Force has noted on several occasions the possibility of moving forward with proposed changes in the 2021 Legislative Session, without coming to a consensus on whether or not doing so would be a good idea. Broadly stated, the work ahead will fall into three phases:

- i. Preparing to bring a proposal to the legislature. The Governor's Office has been working to develop a legislative proposal based on the recommendations of the Task Force.
- ii. As noted above, the legislature approves any changes, there would need to be a transitional period between the legislature's action and the actual launch of a new structure. Numerous issues of implementation could be addressed by the state in this time period. In the two most recent states to make a substantial governance change – New Mexico and Washington – the change was given slightly over a year of lead time, suggesting a launch date for the new structure of FY 2023. The Task Force agreed that an appropriate transition period is important, and that any legislation authorizing governance change should provide enough lead time to ensure that the transition is executed as smoothly as possible.
- iii. The transition does not end when a new structure is established. Indeed, substantial effort will likely be needed in the first year or two of the new structure to ensure that it takes hold and

begins to realize some of the promise identified by the Task Force. It is unrealistic to expect complete success within the first year or two, but some early wins are likely to be needed to give the work momentum.

Wyoming has applied for federal Preschool Development Grant renewal funds that would allow the state to support this work over the next three years. Clarity about the schedule of work within those three years will allow the state to be most effective in moving forward. One of the first steps in the transition planning process will be identifying which issues relating to the transition need to be resolved before a new agency structure is established, and which issues should be held for resolution until the new structure is up and running.

Summary

The Task Force is recommending moving IDEA functions and the Head Start Collaboration office into the Department of Education, with Quality Counts functions and leadership for home visiting moving to the Department of Family Services. The Task Force's goal is not just to move programs from one agency to another – it is to see the programs function in a new way, with higher-level leadership setting a coherent direction for the field. These new responsibilities should build on the agencies' current responsibilities in early childhood, and they should work together to develop clear policies and communicate more effectively with the field – and families.

The Task Force has worked to develop this proposal in the knowledge that a great deal of work will be needed to make it a reality. The members of the Task Force believe that if the recommendations of this report are implemented successfully, it will lead to better outcomes for children and families in Wyoming. The pandemic is taking a significant toll on Wyoming's early childhood field, and the Task Force hopes that this report will help contribute to a brighter future for early childhood services in the state.

Appendix: Members of the Task Force

Heather Babbitt, Deputy Administrator, Wyoming Department of Health (Cheyenne)
Lachelle Brant, Office of Governor Mark Gordon (Cheyenne)
Landon Brown, Representative, District 9 (Cheyenne)
Samin Dadelahi, Chief Operating Officer, Wyoming Community Foundation (Laramie)
Jennifer Davis, Office of Governor Mark Gordon (Cheyenne)
Shelley Hamel, Chief Academic Officer, Department of Education (Cheyenne)
R.J. Kost, Senator, District 19 (Powell)
Nina Lenz, Parent (Jackson)
Roxanne O'Connor, Senior Administrator for Support Services, Wyoming Department of Family Services (Cheyenne)
Sheila Ricley, Business Training and Support Supervisor, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (Cheyenne)*
Quentin Rinker, Uinta County Early Head Start Director (Evanston)
Stephanie Rino, Director, Foundations Early Care and Education (Casper)
Korin Schmidt, Director, Wyoming Department of Family Services (Cheyenne)
Deana Smith, Education Consultant, Wyoming Department of Education (Cheyenne)
Emily Smith, Teacher – Purple Bus, Fremont County School District #6 (Pavillion)
Becca Steinhoff, Program Manager and Consultant, Align (Casper)
Jaime Stine, Executive Director, Albany County Developmental Daycare and Preschool (Laramie)
Michelle Sullivan, Director, Wyoming Afterschool Alliance (Sheridan)
Angie Van Houten, Community Health Section, Wyoming Department of Health (Cheyenne)
Chris Wiederspahn, Program Manager, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (Cheyenne)

The Task Force had an initial briefing on June 11. It met July 23, August 3, September 23, October 9, October 23, and December 4.

* Sheila Ricley resigned her position at the Department of Workforce Services on October 16 and took a position at Align.