



Southern Regional Initiative on Child Care: Action Plan to Improve Access to Child Care Assistance for Low-Income Families in the South

Survey Results on the Status of Implementation Efforts September 2002

Your State:	Alabama
Your Name:	Jeanetta E. Green
Your Job Title:	Program Manager
Name of Agency:	Alabama Department of Human Resources
Mailing Address:	P O Box 304000 50 Ripley Street Montgomery, AL 36130
E-Mail Address:	Jgreen@dhr.state.al.us
Phone:	334-242-1427

Goal 1 - Federal, State, Local and Private Funds Should Be Sufficient to Meet 100% of Need for Direct Child Care Assistance, Based on Initial Eligibility Levels at 85% of the State Median Income. Redetermination Levels Should Allow Families to Retain Child Care Assistance Until They Reach 100% of State Median Income.

(Action Step 1.1) - Educate federal and state policymakers on the need for action.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Many national organizations including the Education Commission of the States (ECS) are providing the State of Alabama technical assistance on early care and education policy issues. Through a two-year ECS public policy institute on early learning, we are educating state policy makers on the need for action. The advocacy community is working with state agency representatives, the Alabama Partnership for Children and the business community to coordinate our efforts on early care and education issues and to ensure that we are delivering a consistent message to federal and state policy makers.

(Action Step 1.2) - Educate the business community on the need for leadership in achieving state, federal and community resources to meet 100% of need.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

The Alabama Partnership for children is working with business, state and nonprofit entities to implement Alabama's strategic plan for children. The business community through APC leads the effort to maximize federal, state and community resources.

(Action Step 1.3) - Increase federal funding for the Child Care and Development Fund to fulfill current policy allowing federal matching funds for child care assistance up to 85% of the state median income.

2002 Response:
NA

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 1.4) - Increase state funding to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families who seek child care assistance.

2002 Response:
No new information

2001 Response:

In September 2001 the Department created the staff position of Special Projects Coordinator within the child care program. The Special Projects Coordinator functions to research and seek alternative sources of funding for child care including seeking additional sources of state funding. The position was filled effective January 2, 2002.

(Action Step 1.5) - Mobilize federal, state and community resources in support of families who need child care assistance.

2002 Response:
Created the Child Day Care Advisory Committee. This is a 20 member core committee consisting of:

- Professionals from child care and early education;
- Health professionals;
- Representatives from State agencies that provide services to children and families;
- Child and family advocates;
- Business leaders;
- Parents; and
- Providers

The Committee's charge is to serve as a "sounding board" and to provide input into a variety of child care issues and programs. The Committee will serve in an advisory capacity, providing discussion, insight, problem solving and a broad perspective for informed policy decisions.

2001 Response:

The Alabama Partnership for Children (APC), a 501(c)3, has been established to assist the State in full utilization of available resources for children by providing a state structure for public/private partnerships. The APC will initially allow us to bring business together with State Agencies and communities to improve coordination of services and maximize utilization of resources as well as bring new resources to Alabama. Child care assistance is a tremendous issue for families with young children and we plan to help with coordination and resource development through this new nonprofit.

Goal 2: States and Communities Should Broaden Their Child Care Eligibility and Subsidy Policies to Meet the Economic, Work and Education Needs of Families

(Action Step 2.1) - Establish co-payments not to exceed 10% of gross family income.

2002 Response:

In January 2002 the Department implemented its proposal to reduce co-pays for parents with two or more children in care. Through this effort the average co-payment paid by parents has been reduced to 6.1%.

2001 Response:

The average co-payment paid by parents is 8.8% of the gross income. Plans are underway to reduce co-pays by allowing a discount for the second and any subsequent children.

(Action Step 2.2) - Provide child care assistance to students who qualify under the income guidelines.

2002 Response:

Same

2001 Response:

Participation requirements were reduced to an average of 15 hours per week to allow for more participation of students. In addition, full-time students are deemed to meet the participation requirement.

(Action Step 2.3) - Explore broad use of income exemptions to address affordability of child care.

2002 Response:

The Department exempts child support lump sum income that is received as the result of a federal or state tax intercept of the non-custodial parent.

2001 Response:

Currently there are no specific income exemptions in place. However, the need for exemptions of some income is being explored.

(Action Step 2.4) - Eliminate asset testing (e.g. automobile or savings account) from criteria for child care assistance.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

There are no asset testing requirements in place in Alabama for eligibility of child care assistance.

(Action Step 2.5) - Index income eligibility levels for inflation.

2002 Response:
NA

2001 Response:

NA

Goal 3: Outreach Initiatives Should Be Designed and Aggressively Implemented to Assure That Families Have Accessible and Easy-To-Understand Information on Child Care Assistance and Are Provided Assistance in Applying.

(Action Step 3.1) - Provide information on child care subsidies through multiple sources, venues and the media.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Information on eligibility for child care subsidies in Alabama are readily available through printed materials from any of the 12 Child Care Management Agencies (CMA) throughout the state and from DHR staff in any of the 67 county DHR offices. In addition CMAs distribute child care eligibility information from resource van visits. General information and some statistics are also available on the Department's web site.

(Action Step 3.2) - Ensure that information is accurate, family friendly, employer friendly, culturally sensitive and provided in multiple languages, as appropriate.

2002 Response:
Plans are being implemented to make some standard subsidy forms available in Spanish throughout the state.

2001 Response:

Application information from each of the 12 Child Care Management Agencies (CMAs) is reviewed during programmatic monitoring for content. Regions that serve multi-language populations have some information available in Spanish.

(Action Step 3.3) - Present information in a manner that would remove the stigma associated with receiving subsidies.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

In our experience this has not been a tremendous issue in Alabama. The process of payment for subsidy and the parents sharing in the cost makes it more difficult for families to be identified as receiving assistance.

(Action Step 3.4) - Provide literature and assistance to help parents make informed provider choices.

2002 Response:
In addition to the Child Care Management Agencies other private and public non-profit agencies for quality enhancement activities. These agencies also provide information on choosing quality child care.

2001 Response:

Each of the 12 Child Care Management Agencies maintains a Resource & Referral (R & R) for all licensed and approved exempt providers within their region. The list is made available to each applicant and recipient needing assistance in selecting a child care provider. In addition, pamphlets on choosing child care applicable to a child's age level are provided to parents.

(Action Step 3.5) - Coordinate ongoing and strategic outreach activities among common organizations and providers.

2002 Response:
No new information.

2001 Response:

Communication and coordination is being stressed through quality child care initiatives of the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Children's Affairs, and the Alabama Partnership for Children. The Governor appointed a Commission on Early Learning headed by twelve of Alabama's most prominent business leaders to develop a plan for early learning. This Commission made several recommendations in the area of coordination of services.

(Action Step 3.6) - Offer cross-training and information to providers, community organizations, faith organizations, and state agencies to inform them about child care assistance programs and how to assist families in filing applications.

2002 Response:

In addition to information shared by Kid and Kin program, Child Care Management Agencies share subsidy program information with providers. Effective August 1, 2002 a Provider Guide was established for all providers that participate in the Subsidy Program. The Provider Guide is given as a resource of information about the Subsidy Program and helps providers who participate in the Program understand the rules of the Program.

2001 Response:

Through the Kids and Kin Program in partnership with VOICES for Alabama's Children, community and faith-based organizations are helping to identify informal relative care child care providers. These providers are being mentored by child care partners who assist them with all types of resources including information about the subsidy program. They help the relative caregivers work through the paperwork and resources associated with accessing the program. In 2001 several trainings were held for faith-based providers on the States licensing regulations. Subsidy Program information was shared with providers at these training.

Goal 4: The Child Care Application and Redetermination Processes Should Be Uncomplicated and Family Friendly.

(Action Step 4.1) - Simplify applications for child care assistance.

2002 Response:

Same

2001 Response:

The application process completed by the parent has been simplified to a one-page document.

(Action Step 4.2) - Allow filing by mail, phone, fax or internet.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Currently a parent can make application for the waiting list either in person, by phone or by mail.

(Action Step 4.3) - Minimize requests for documentation at initial application and utilize documents already on file.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Applicants are not required to submit duplicate copies of birth certificates, personal IDs, etc. which are already on file from a previous application. Further, income and other documentation provided on client referrals from the TANF, Protective Service and foster care units are deemed to be sufficient verification without requiring additional verification from the parent.

(Action Step 4.4) - Provide applications at multiple sites.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Applications are provided at each main location and satellite office of the 12 CMAs in Alabama, as well as at each county DHR office.

(Action Step 4.5) - Offer non-conventional hours of operation for eligibility offices and provide toll-free phone lines to include evening and weekend hours.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Some of the CMAs in Alabama, especially in urban areas, have extended hours of operation 1-2 nights per week for applying for services and conducting interviews to determine eligibility.

(Action Step 4.6) - Explore presumptive eligibility or otherwise provide immediate eligibility contingent upon final approval.

2002 Response:

NA

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 4.7) - Eliminate requirements for a face-to-face interview both for initial application and for redetermination.

2002 Response:

Same

2001 Response:

A face to face interview is not required for client cases referred from the protective service, foster care, and TANF agencies.

(Action Step 4.8) - Provide consultation on making appropriate choices when excessive requests for provider changes are filed.

2002 Response:

Same

2001 Response:

Staff at each CMA provides individual consultation to parents when frequent changes of providers are made.

(Action Step 4.9) - Establish a 12-month redetermination period where there are no changes in income or job status.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

All certification periods are set at a maximum of six months.

(Action Step 4.10) - Continue eligibility for full subsidy for 12 weeks if family loses employment but can document that a job search is underway.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Eligibility can continue for an additional 10 days and up to 20 after the loss of employment, if the parent reports the change in circumstances within 10 days of the occurrence.

Goal 5: Establish a Coordinated, Seamless Eligibility System So That Funding Sources Are Invisible to Families and Support Continuity of Child Care.

(Action Step 5.1) - Eliminate the need for families to reapply when eligibility categories change by automatically searching to exhaust all eligibility categories before closing cases.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

The Departments only funding source for child care is CCDF. Some CMAs receive local funding for subsidized care. Parents that are ineligible for CCDF subsidy and eligible for local funding subsidy are automatically changed to the new funding category without the need to reapply.

(Action Step 5.2) - Explore the potential for policy and procedural changes to achieve linkages with or combined applications for child care assistance, Head Start, Pre-K and Title I.

2002 Response:
NA

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 5.3) - Continue eligibility in programs with multiple funding sources to assure continuity of care in the event that eligibility has expired or terminated in one program.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Some of the CMAs have local funding sources available to provide childcare for higher income caps. Thus, some families who become ineligible for CCDF due to excess income can continue receiving local subsidies.

(Action Step 5.4) - Work collaboratively with all public and private programs and funding sources to assure that children receive stable and consistent early child care services.

2002 Response:

In March 2002 the Department formed the Child Day Care Advisory Committee. This committee made up of a wide range of public and private agency members, community and business leaders and providers advise the Department on issues relevant to early care services.

2001 Response:

The Department works collaboratively with the Department of Children's Affairs, Head Start Collaboration Office and other state agencies that deal with early care issues. In it's RFP for quality services the Department stressed the importance of each funding agency collaboration with state and local early care service providers and resources in their area. Part of the evaluation of submitted proposals focused on the strength of the agency's collaborative efforts.

Goal 6: Establish Customer Service Outcome Goals and Set Standards to Ensure that All Families are Treated With Dignity and Respect and Are Served in an Efficient Manner.

(Action Step 6.1) - Provide professional and well-trained eligibility staff who are culturally and linguistically sensitive.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Alabama contracts with 12 public and private non-profit agencies who provide eligibility determination for child care services. The Department provides policy guidance and technical assistance to caseworkers. Workers in a limited number of the areas are bilingual.

(Action Step 6.2) - Facilitate quick eligibility determination through reasonable caseloads and/or administrative structure.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

Eligibility caseloads average less 250 cases per worker.

(Action Step 6.3) - Conduct periodic, independent and thorough consumer satisfaction assessments, assuring the confidentiality of information collected.

2002 Response:
A pilot project to survey client satisfaction is being conducted in one Child Care Management Agency region.

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 6.4) - Provide adequate support for child care resource and referral services.

2002 Response:
Same

2001 Response:

All child care quality enhancement partners work collaboratively with CMAs who provide resource and referral services for the State.

Goal 7: Design the Subsidy System So That Rate Structures Assure That Families Receiving Child Care Assistance Have Access to All Types of Child Care and Disallow Charges Above Established Co-Payments.

(Action Step 7.1) - States should cap reimbursement rates at no less than the 75th percentile based on a market rate survey conducted every two years that accurately reflects the price of all types of care in communities across the state.

2002 Response:

Same

2001 Response:

The Department concluded its market rate survey in July 2001. New rates based on the survey were effective October 1, 2001. The new rates represent an overall 10.3 percent increase from previous rates.

(Action Step 7.2) - Establish and evaluate reimbursement policies that encourage provider participation and are responsive to family needs.

2002 Response:

Same

2001 Response:

Providers are reimbursed for up to five (5) days per month regardless of the nature of the absence. In addition, providers are allowed 12 reimbursable closure days and 5 reimbursable day for emergency closures, due to provide illness, death of an immediate family member or inclement weather. Revised chronic absenteeism policy to allow for up to 10 reimbursable days per month when child's absence is due to a documented illness.

(Action Step 7.3) - Prohibit providers from charging above the established co-payments.

2002 Response:

NA

2001 Response:

NA

Goal 8: Create Partnerships With Employers to Expand Child Care Assistance for Working Families.

(Action Step 8.1) - Educate employers about the bottom line benefits associated with public and private child care assistance.

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

The State and advocacy communities are working with the business community on the importance of quality child care for all children. Economic indicators tying quality child care to economic and workforce development are being designed with the support of the Education Commission of the States.

(Action Step 8.2) - Enlist business leaders to champion the involvement of southern businesses and to serve as mentors to other businesses.

2002 Response:

Business support is an ongoing project of the Alabama Partnership for Children

2001 Response:

Business helped developed the strategic plan for early care and education in Alabama. We are working through the Alabama Partnership for Children to educate and develop more business support for early care and education issues.

(Action Step 8.3) - Provide information to employers on all available tax benefits related to child care assistance, including deductions for donations to tax-exempt child care organizations, capital costs for constructing a child care center and establishing a pre-tax dependent care assistance plan.

2002 Response:

2001 Response:

Many advocacy organizations are trying to raise the dependent child care tax credit. We also are working to bring the earned income tax credit to the national federal level.

(Action Step 8.4) - Facilitate collaborative initiatives that enable employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

2002 Response:

In addition to the Employer Child Care Alliance the work of the Alabama Partnership for Children and the Child Day Care Advisory Committee involves business in the issues related to child care.

2001 Response:

The Department's Quality Enhancement partnership with the Employers Child Care Alliance in Opelika, AL enables employers to share ideas as well as pool their resources to address child care needs.

(Action Step 8.5) - Provide matching funds or other tax or financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

2002 Response:

No new information

2001 Response:

Through a Ford Foundation Grant called Healthy, Wealthy and Wise, VOICES for Alabama's Children is focusing on tax and financial incentives for employers to invest in child care.

(Action Step 8.6) - Establish incentives for employers to create child care benefit programs for their employees or to contribute to child care purchasing pools in their state or community.

2002 Response:

NA

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 8.7) - Reduce the administrative burden on employers participating in any joint public/private child care assistance program.

2002 Response:

NA

2001 Response:

NA

Goal 9: Provide Child Care Assistance to Working Families Through Federal and State Tax Laws.

(Action Step 9.1) - Make the federal child dependent care tax credit refundable.

2002 Response:
No new information

2001 Response:

For all Action steps under Goal 9, the Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care.

(Action Step 9.2) - Establish refundable child and dependent care tax credits in states with income taxes.

2002 Response:
No new information

2001 Response:

The Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care.

(Action Step 9.3) - Raise federal and state child care tax credit expense limits to accurately reflect the price of quality care.

2002 Response:
No new information

2001 Response:

The Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care.

(Action Step 9.4) - Index for inflation the state and federal child and dependent care tax credit income eligibility and expense limits.

2002 Response:
No new information

2001 Response:

The Ford Foundation grant to VOICES for Alabama's Children is allowing our State to explore tax friendly policy for child care

(Action Step 9.5) - Ensure that child and dependent care tax credits are clearly identified and easy to claim by filers using either the short or long form.

2002 Response:
NA

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 9.6) - Encourage the use of effective state tax strategies to provide financial support for child care.

2002 Response:
NA

2001 Response:

NA

Goal 10: States Should Have Effective, Coordinated Systems to Guide Child Care and Early Childhood Policy Decisions and Direct Use of Resources.

(Action Step 10.1) - Facilitate greater coordination in eligibility policies across child care and early childhood education programs at state and local levels.

2002 Response:
NA

2001 Response:

NA

(Action Step 10.2) - All southern states and the District of Columbia should participate in a collaborative effort to develop and collect common data elements across states.

2002 Response:

NA

2001 Response:

NA