

EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

Quality, affordable childcare is a pressing need across the state and country- but particularly in rural communities where there are unique challenges in the delivery of childcare services. Disparities that occur in rural Kansas surrounding childcare and early education have been a barrier to further business growth and a higher quality of life across the state. In addition to on-the-ground feedback from local practitioners, ORP relies on the expertise and work of the Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund and partnering agencies.



“ The prosperity of our rural communities, and our state, depends on the well-being of our youngest Kansans. Investing in early childhood programs yields improved health, education, and economic outcomes. When young children have their basic needs met, we prepare the future of our state for success. ”

- Melissa Rooker, Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

In 2019, the Children’s Cabinet conducted a comprehensive statewide needs assessment, to identify key gaps in childcare and the impact they have on communities and businesses. The [All In For Kansas Kids Needs Assessment](#) included input from more than 6,100 Kansans in all 105 counties and builds on thousands of data points to support its findings.



CENTRAL MESSAGES

The experiences of families with young children in Kansas are shaped by where they live, both across the regions of the state and within their communities.

- Geography impacts the availability and accessibility of early care and education services and supports, creating isolation and navigation barriers.
- Poverty rates also vary by where people live — they’re highest in densely settled rural and lowest in frontier counties. Additionally, services are impacted when 70% of board-certified psychiatrists are located in one of only five urban counties.

Young children are growing up in families where basic needs are not being met.

- 27% of families in Kansas are low income despite 70% reporting that all parents are employed.
- Different parts of the state face various challenges. For example, Southeast Kansas counties rank lowest in many health outcomes while children in Western Kansas are more likely to be uninsured.
- Nearly one in five children under the age of 5 live in poverty – with significant disparity among ethnic and racial groups.

KEY FINDINGS

ACCESSIBILITY



AVAILABILITY



NAVIGATION



COLLABORATION



WORKFORCE



FACILITIES



SYSTEM ALIGNMENT



BRIGHT SPOTS



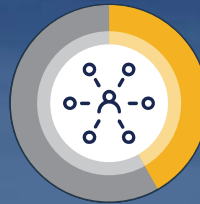
RURAL KANSAS FACES UNIQUE CHALLENGES



ACCESSIBILITY - 92% of childcare providers do not offer non-traditional hours (second and third shift and weekends), a concern expressed by rural working Kansans and childcare providers to ORP and the Children's Cabinet.



WORKFORCE - 98% of rural counties are unable to meet the needs of parents with children ages birth to 6, including before and after school programs, as rural childcare providers struggle to make the profession financially viable and retain staff.



AVAILABILITY - 44% of Kansans live in a childcare desert, a statistic that particularly impacts rural (45%), low-income (63%), and Hispanic and Latino populations (60%).

ADDRESSING THE NEED

The Children's Cabinet used the findings from the needs assessment to complete their [All In For Kansas Kids Strategic Plan](#). While every goal is designed to address a statewide need, rural areas have unique challenges that demand community-specific solutions. These rural-focused tactics include:

- **State-Level Coordination:** Identify and support telehealth opportunities in a variety of healthcare and early childcare and education settings to increase access to specialty services in rural areas.
- **Capacity and Access:** Encourage partnerships for a cooperative model for childcare services that meet the unique needs of rural and family childcare.

To make progress on many of the goals outlined in the strategic plan, Kansas was awarded a three-year, \$8.9 million grant. In the first year, \$2.1 million will go toward the [Pre-School Development Grant Birth Through Five](#) initiative. This program will support a broad range of community partners as they address the unique needs of their families and providers, including a specific category focused on rural communities.



COVID-19 RESPONSE

In the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Children's Cabinet used its existing communications infrastructure to engage in dialogue, provide resources, and deliver up-to-date news and information to providers and families. Additionally, the Children's Cabinet partnered with the Kansas Department for Children and Families, The Kansas Department of Health and Environment, and the Kansas Department of Education to use existing funding to provide grants to childcare providers. Over \$90,000 was distributed to 180 childcare providers in April 2020.

In collaboration with state agencies and early childhood leaders across the state, the Children's Cabinet received support and funding from the SPARK Task Force to carry out three initiatives:

1. WORKFORCE HEALTH FUNDS for COVID-19 related medical expenses for individuals providing early childcare, education, and other essential work during the pandemic.

2. CHILD CARE HEALTH CONSULTANTS (CCHC) AND CHILD CARE FACILITY GRANTS for all KDHE-licensed facilities. These grants enable consultants to advise on actions or modifications needed to meet CDC health and safety recommendations for infectious disease control and provide resources to make targeted improvements when feasible.

3. TECHNOLOGY FOR FAMILIES FUND allows families to stay connected to home-visiting programs with devices and connectivity supports for virtual home visits.

Additionally, the Children's Cabinet administered a \$40 million [Remote Learning Grant Initiative](#) designed to provide secure settings where children can receive quality supervision and learning supports when schools are in hybrid or remote learning modes.



Governor Kelly designated the Children's Cabinet to lead the Early Childhood Advisory Council and established a Kansas Early Childhood Recommendations Panel to provide vision and guidance on early childhood programs and services. Through collaboration and technical expertise, the Panel is a critical component of the governance structure supporting early childhood initiatives in Kansas.

kschildrencabinet@ksde.org
kschildrencabinet.org



CHILDCARE AND EARLY EDUCATION

As one of ORP's key priority areas, it was important to Lieutenant Governor Rogers to discuss the challenges that parents, childcare centers, and in-home providers were experiencing due to COVID. ORP worked with early childhood advocate and state representative Monica Murnan to bring together childcare professionals, parents, and educators from Southeast and South Central Kansas to hear their success stories and ongoing challenges. Despite childcare providers working to support so many other essential workers and industries during the pandemic, many faced significant economic fallout.

Providers shared stories of parents pulling their children without notice in early March with spots not being filled until late summer. This caused some centers and providers to shut their doors entirely. Those who survived the initial closures of the pandemic were faced with figuring out how to rearrange their spaces in order to meet recommended safety protocols. Additionally, scarcity of cleaning supplies and toiletries paired with difficulty finding protein and dairy products made it difficult to fulfill food program requirements.

Several providers shared of increased behavioral challenges as children exhibited signs of increased stress — a serious issue they continued to see throughout the public health crisis as families experienced job losses and other strains. Amy Boyd, Director of New Generation Childcare

in Bourbon County, reports that parents “are totally worn down. I’m not a counselor, and I have parents come into my office that just want to talk.” New Generation Childcare is licensed for up to 84 children, but at one point during the pandemic, the center’s attendance dropped to 14. Through all the challenges, Boyd exemplifies the dedication of so many early childhood providers and educators, saying, “We’ve been here for 30 years and we don’t plan to close our doors.”

Even before the pandemic, Martin Burke, Superintendent of West Elk Schools, shared that his community was focused on creating a center for children birth to five years because quality options were not available. “My wife has two master’s degrees and when we were early in our career, one of the catalysts that propelled her into being a stay-at-home mom was to ensure our children had quality and affordable childcare,” Burke said. With schools closing in March, Burke reported that without other options, parents either had to take leave from their jobs, ask for help from relatives, or seek care from unlicensed providers.

As discussed in the Childcare priorities section, the Children’s Cabinet has actively provided relief to centers, providers, and parents since the height of the pandemic. For many, more support is needed to meet demand for increased quality childcare options across the state, especially in rural Kansas.



Our Tomorrows Story Bank

2020

The Kansas Children’s Cabinet and Trust Fund, in partnership with the University of Kansas, is leading efforts to build an **Our Tomorrows Story Bank**. This collection of personal stories from Kansans about their experiences today is intended to inform how we all can help shape a brighter tomorrow. While these stories, and the anonymous collection and dissemination of them, are meant to be brief, straightforward, and as real-time as possible, the resulting “story bank” is rich and deep with data to be analyzed and explored.

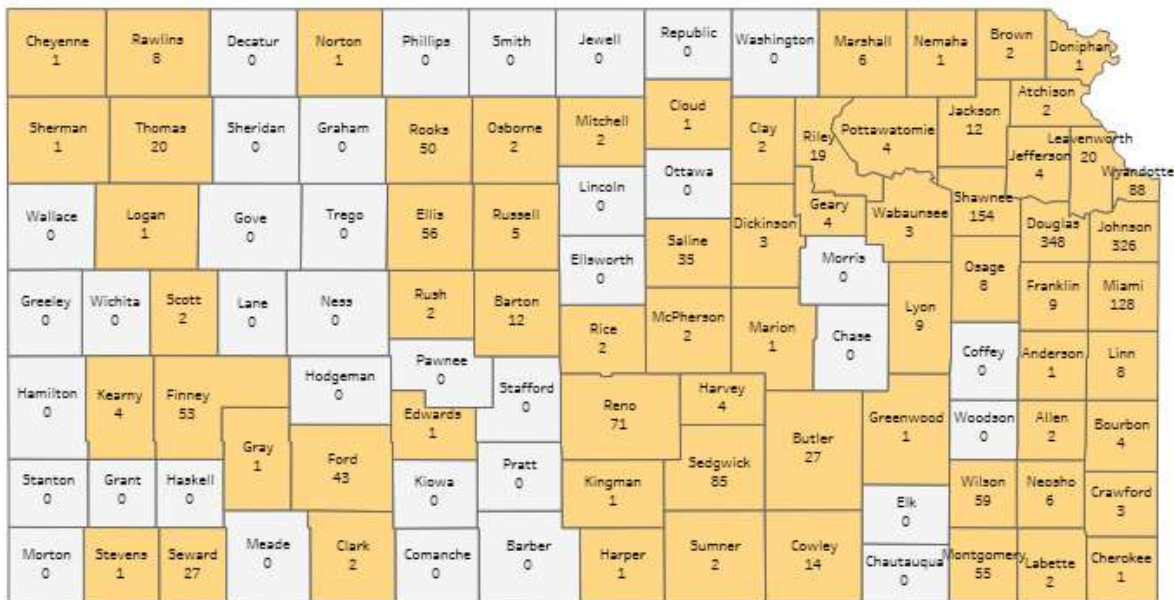
Data in this report was collected between March 27 and November 22, 2020

Story Bank Snapshot

Total stories shared by Kansans: 1,994

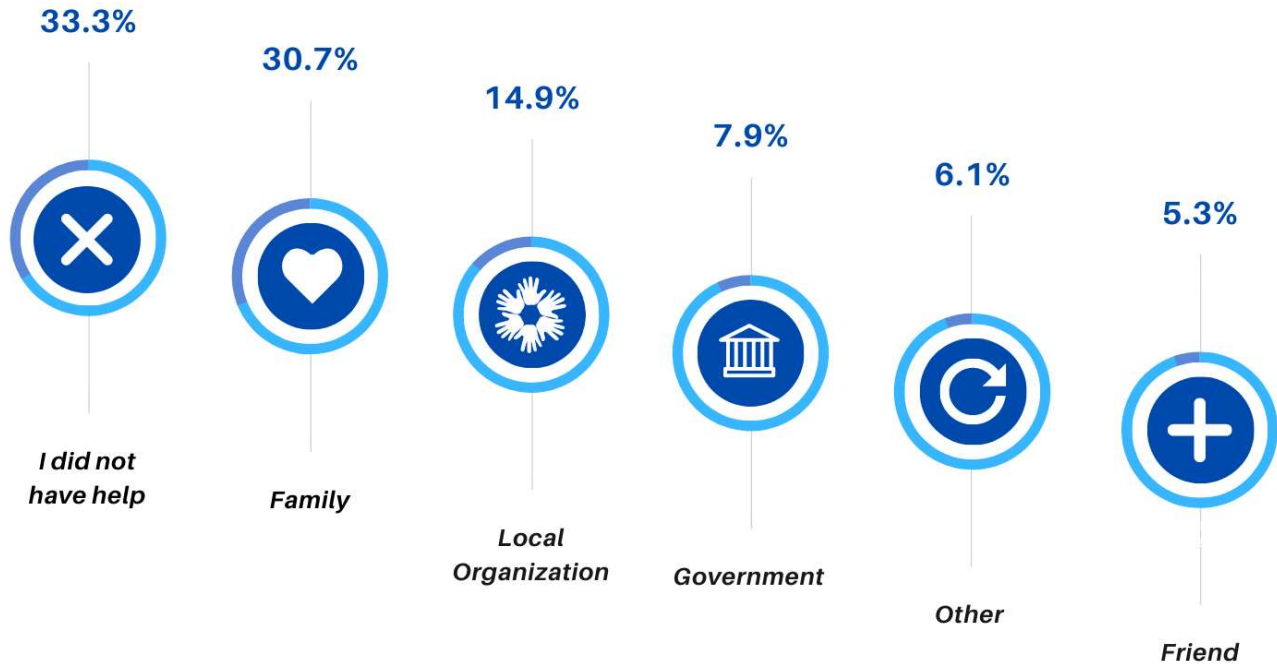
Total stories shared by those who indicated they live in a “very remote or rural area”: 114 (5.7%)

Story counts by Kansas county:



Basic Needs

Who was most helpful in meeting basic needs in the experience you shared?



Percent of total stories collected from remote or rural voices
Total n=114, collected between 3/27/20 and 11/22/20

The **Basic Needs multiple choice question** helps understand real experiences in terms of who is helping families meet their basic needs.

- 7.9% of remote and rural voices shared that the **government** helped meet basic needs, as compared to 5.7% of the total Story Bank.
- 33.3% of remote and rural voices reported that they did not have any help with meeting their basic needs, significantly higher than those in the total Story Bank that indicated the same (21%).
- A review of the stories from those indicating they did not have help, respondents often reported struggling with family separation and health or healthcare issues. These respondents were also more likely to be Hispanic and more likely to be aged 44 years or younger. However, there was a pretty even distribution of these stories among all annual income brackets, suggesting that a lack of help is a struggle for families across a range of income and employment situations in rural Kansas.