

**Blue Ribbon Commission on the
Delivery of Services to Children and Families**

Guiding Principles for the Department of Children, Youth & Families

The commission began its work by developing guiding principles regarding the essential attributes for this new department and how the state should serve children, youth, and families across its agencies. Thousands of families across the state struggle with poverty, mental health and substance abuse issues, child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, homelessness, racial or cultural inequities and other challenges. Even the most resilient children exposed to these circumstances often experience severe trauma and hardship, impairing their ability to succeed in school and beyond. The commission's work offered a unique opportunity to review the programs and delivery systems in light of current data and research that will emphasize prevention and improve child and youth well-being, especially for those most vulnerable.

1. Focus on prevention.

Services will be targeted to help support and strengthen families before crises occur and children and youth become system-involved. For those already involved with any state system, every contact is leveraged as an opportunity for prevention strategies with connection to other needed services that will help to minimize further or additional system involvement or harm.

2. Focus on promoting child, youth and family well-being.

Services will be centered on the "whole person" social determinants of health and well-being approach, including the social, emotional, cognitive, physical health and socio-economic aspects of children, youth and families, with an emphasis on both the impact of poverty and factors contributing to poverty.

3. Focus on an optimal developmental pathway.

Services will be centered on children and youth meeting key milestones in their early development through adulthood, with a particular emphasis on early brain development and kindergarten readiness.

4. Prioritize children, youth and families furthest from opportunity and those at greatest risk for negative outcomes.

Services will be prioritized for those children and youth research has shown to be at highest risk of negative outcomes based on income; geography; and social, demographic or other risk factors.

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5. Ensure services are science-based, outcome-driven, data-informed and collaborative.

Data, science and evidence will be used to evaluate and redesign services regardless of which agency has the budget authority to provide them or the reason for the initial referral. Services should be evidence-based, with flexibility to use research-based or promising practices where needed; focused on safety, well-being and other priority outcomes; and aligned and integrated, with collaboration across all state-run and state-funded programs serving children, youth and families. Results will be tracked to ensure they are achieving measurable improvements in the lives of children, youth and families.

6. Improve the connections among children, youth, families and communities.

Well-being of children, youth and families will be improved through stronger connection with communities, with particular focus on addressing multigenerational challenges.

7. Address racial and ethnic disproportionality and disparities.

Children, youth and families of all races, ethnicities and cultures will have equitable access, supports and outcomes. Outcome measures will always be transparent regarding any disparities.

8. Ensure programs and services are effective and accountable.

Programs and services will be cost-effective and accountable. Partnerships with nonprofits, institutions of higher education and foundations will be leveraged as opportunities for enhanced research, training and funding capacity.

9. Develop a skilled and supported workforce.

Staff at all levels will receive the training, resources, tools, appropriate compensation and other support needed to meet the agency's goals in an environment driven by innovation, replication of success, use of best practices and educational partnerships, with requisite expertise and sufficient capacity to serve the public well in all parts of the state.

10. Provide leadership and funding to achieve the mission and vision.

The new agency will preserve and continue what is working based on the best evidence available and will make sure there is sufficient funding for the array of needed services, as well as for a well-trained and supported workforce. The agency also will ensure that there are leadership and staff in the department who are not doing the day-to-day service delivery but are directing the innovation, outcome, alignment, integration, collaboration, transition and redesign work.