

## **Audio Conference for Governors' Policy Advisors on Children's Cabinets and Councils**

March 7, 2007

Hosted by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices

Call Notes

### *Susan Golonka, NGA: Overview of Children's Cabinets/Commissions/Councils*

Children's Cabinet/Commission/Council take on many different forms but are most effective when directly tied to the governor's office and vision. Their goal is to facilitate more comprehensive efforts for families and children.

Their missions vary. They are usually to improve outcomes for children and youth; but may start with a narrow focus and change over time. They often go through the process of learning and improving.

Duties include:

- Creating strategic plans around children's issues
- Setting goals with measurable outcomes
- Making funding and policy recommendations to the governor
- Pooling funding to improve service delivery
- Providing funding for local level efforts
- Technical Assistance for local collaborations

Structure options:

- Housed in:
  - Governor's Office
  - Dept. or Agency
- May have complimentary local association
- May be formed through Executive Order or Legislative Statute
- May be led by Governor, Lieutenant Governor, First Spouse, or key legislator

Elements of success:

- Committed leadership
- Committed membership
- Buy-in from agencies and stakeholders

### *Arlene Lee, Director of the Maryland Children's Cabinet and Office for Children Youth and Families: History and Overview of the Maryland Children's Cabinet*

Maryland's cabinet was created initially in 1988 by Executive Order, as a subcabinet for Children, Youth and Families, which grew out of conversations between the Governor and the Casey Foundation around Casey's systems reform. In 1990 the budget was codified and local boards added. The subcabinet was originally made up of child service agencies addressing out of state placement. Membership evolved with leadership; emphasis shifted to disabilities and interagency collaboration.

There was dissatisfaction about whether Governor's Office for Children, Youth, and Families and subcabinet were accomplishing what they needed to accomplish, so a sunset provision was added to law in 1990s. Two years ago had to revisit whether or not to extend these entities because of sunset. Much discussion and controversy within legislature, advocates, and governor's office, about whether entities were accomplishing goals. The conclusion was no, so legislature allowed law to sunset. Governor Erlich

decided to reestablish cabinet and office via executive order, creating the Children's Cabinet. Last year, our local planning bodies, Local Management Boards (LMBs), and other elements were codified and functions and funds recodified. Membership of the Cabinet still exists via executive order.

*Susan:* Maryland provides an example of the challenges and evolution that can occur over time. The cabinet had to change and adapt to continue to be effective.

*Arlene:* A downfall or challenge for us was mission creep. All things can come under the umbrella of children youth and families, so remaining focused on mission and goal is key.

*Claire Dudley, Director, New Mexico Children's Cabinet:* **History and Overview of the New Mexico Children's Cabinet**

New Mexico has a new cabinet compared to Maryland. It was established through a February 2003 executive order, signed by Governor Richardson. It stemmed from series of conversations that the Governor and Lieutenant Governor had with members of the American Pediatric Society and other advocates in New Mexico. Governor Richardson stressed the need for closer coordination and communication across state agencies. He appointed Lieutenant Governor Diane Denish to serve as chair. In 2005, state legislation codified the cabinet in statute.

Thinking of a Children's Cabinet or Council as a framework is an effective way to think about it; the cabinet itself is not an end result.

---

## **Mission/Goals**

*Susan:* For the goal/mission of a cabinet, how broad is too broad?

*Arlene:* In Maryland, when we started the mission was very focused on children with special needs. I think that over the years it became clear that that narrow focus wasn't getting people to the goals they wanted to accomplish and wasn't being adhered to, so cabinet was becoming Christmas tree for any and all children's and youth issues.

In the 1990s we established results and indicators to guide the cabinet. Refocused on these results in the past year (because they had been established but lost).

The Children's Cabinet's Goal is to ensure that all children in Maryland are successful in life. In order to do that, 8 results have to happen. We refocused on this results framework, and gave it new life.

Vision Statement: All Maryland's children will be successful in life.

8 results:

1. Babies born healthy
2. Healthy Children
3. Children enter school ready to learn
4. Children successful in school
5. Children completing school
6. Children safe in their families and communities

7. Stable and economically independent families
8. Communities that support family life

*Claire:* In New Mexico we brought together our 15 secretaries (cabinet members) to develop 5 goals in a retreat, with the Forum for Youth Investment's help. Our goals were a consensus decision made among cabinet members at the retreat. We decided to focus on children and youth ages 0-21, and our vision is that all children are physically, mentally healthy, safe, learn skills and transition to education or employment

Vision/results: We want to create a state where all of our children and youth will be:

- Safe in their families and communities
- Physically and mentally healthy
- Well-educated and provided with opportunities to reach their full potential
- Become productive, self-sufficient and employable adults
- Valued contributors to their community through civic responsibility, connection, and being culturally and linguistically enriched

Mission: The Cabinet was specifically created to oversee and coordinate cross-departmental efforts that include, but are not limited to:

- Promoting and establishing comprehensive policies that impact children and youth
- Assessing and maximizing resource allocation
- Removing administrative barriers to obtaining departmental services and assistance
- Tracking New Mexico indicators concerning child and youth well-being
- Encouraging partnerships that elevate the conversations, expertise, research, and action regarding New Mexico's Children and Youth"

*Susan:* How did you identify the 5 goals in New Mexico or 8 results in Maryland? What was the process? Who did it?

*Arlene:* In the mid 90s we held regional focus groups that were facilitated by a number of consultants, that helped establish results and identify indicators that could help measure those results. It was broad, we built consensus. Over the last year, with NGA, NCSL, and the Forum, we recreated this process, brought stakeholders back together to reexamine the 8 results. Communities, families, agencies, secretaries, all liked them, wanted to recommit to them.

*Claire:* We established our goals in a retreat with our Cabinet members, and the Forum's help.

### **Work of the Cabinets/Achieving Goals**

*Susan:* So once you have set these goals, what work do your cabinets do to achieve them? What are you currently working on?

*Arlene:* Our cabinet is currently being reestablished with the change in Maryland's administration. Some of the work we have in place will continue, but we will have new focus based on concern of new governor and secretaries, so they will have key initiatives. But as a foundation and base we have a three year plan. We are currently developing a

statewide prevention plan with our LMBs, looking at what role local partners should play in each jurisdiction and what recommendations are to comprehensive approach to prevention.

Second we have a “Ready by 21” vision for the state. We met with 40 folks from agencies, youth, families, communities, determine our issues and priorities. Concern about kids transitioning out of Juvenile Justice and foster care was high. New planning effort is probably going to have impact on state’s role as youth exit state services.

*Claire:* we meet on monthly basis, our tasks are outlined in statute. Our work has included:

1. Development of report card, cross departmental workgroup
2. Children’s budget, we are distributing it in the next week or so
3. Town hall gatherings around state with lieutenant governor and members of cabinet, invite parents, youth, public officials, community-based organizations, schools, advocates, funders, etc, come to these meetings. No specific topic in the past, just a time for cabinet to engage with the public. We’ve had very good participation and turnout.
4. Annual have legislative institutes on children youth and families which bring together experts on a variety of topics, child poverty, school/out of school time, childhood obesity, wellness, others.
5. Also created a Youth Alliance made up of youth people around the state who conducted a survey of youth and advise the cabinet.

*Susan:* Do the report card and children’s budget provide impetus for policy change?

*Claire:* We use the report card and the survey of youth conducted by the Youth Alliance. The YA presented these results to the Children’s Cabinets. We use these two things in crafting our policy recommendations

### **Advice for new Cabinets**

*Susan:* What advice do you have for states interested in starting a children’s cabinet?

*Claire:* The first thing is to determine a champion, someone that will really take on the cause of promoting cabinet, and it needs to be in the executive branch: a governor or lieutenant governor. Also funding, the cabinet must be sustainable. Currently we only have one staff person, and even for that position it is a battle every year.

*Arlene:* Having a champion is important. We have had champions from every sector over our history in Maryland. governor, lt. governor, chair of the joint committee (a senator). There is a role for them, but they can change over time (the champion does not always have to be the same person). It is not a static process. It is really a framework, and that is what I have come to embrace. A framework to move governor’s vision and agenda forwards. A place for those who have to operationalize and establish the major programs to come together and thing about what it means to work across systems and how to implement policies.

*Susan:* A cabinet is a vehicle or framework for getting things done.

---

## Question and Answer Session

*Q:* What has the bottom line impact on outcomes such as kids entering school prepared, etc, of forming a cabinet?

*Claire:* It will be some time before we can see lasting changes in New Mexico (because the cabinet is new). But the act of bringing together cabinet secretaries has led to significant partnerships, and the institutionalization of pre-K. This effort was led by two cabinet secretaries who are children's cabinet members. Juvenile Justice is working with our Cultural Affairs department, and unlikely partnership formed through the cabinet.

*Arlene:* In the places where we have good focus we have had good results. In 1999, we focused on children entering school ready to learn. Now we issue a yearly report that demonstrates significant improvements. We are at 62% of kids entering school fully ready to learn (goal was 75%). But we have had fewer results where there hasn't been sustained focus.

*JQ:* Concerning outcomes statements: when you translate into the work, how are you able to sustain efforts in all of those outcome areas, or do you inevitably focus on a couple?

*Arlene:* When we adopt each area, we do 3 things:

1. Pick a priority focus
2. Make sure the other don't drop off
3. Let local collaboratives (LMBs) pick areas as their local data dictates (work based on the outcomes where they are lagging).

*Claire:* Our outcomes are interrelated, so it isn't a big problem, though we have concern about our "involved" outcome, which usually lags.

*Elizabeth Gaines, the Forum for Youth Investment:* Can you talk a bit about Results Based Accountability in Maryland?

*Arlene:* We're going through the process to reestablish RBA on state and local level. We used the Forum and Mark Friedman. We tried to establish local capacity to train people on process: identify key results, look at data, identifying info behind/cause of data, looking at proven strategies that have results in that area, then make action plan, then budget. By the time you go through the process you have made some informed decisions, and it influences people around the table in their other decisions. We are developing performance measures, and really embracing that.

---