



## Alabama

Cohort 6, Funding Period 2014–2019

[www.smartstartalabama.org](http://www.smartstartalabama.org)

### *Grantee Overview*

Alabama LAUNCH is led by a partnership among the Alabama Department of Mental Health, the Alabama Department of Public Health, Child Development Resources of the University of Alabama, and the Alabama Partnership for Children. The project serves children ages birth to 8 years and their families located in Tuscaloosa County and focuses on enhancing and expanding existing mental health and behavioral programs for children and parents and raising awareness among primary care providers.

### *Project Milestones*

All [Project LAUNCH](#) grantees implement five promotion and prevention strategies intended to increase access to preventative care and to raise the quality of prevention and promotion services available to children and families. In Alabama LAUNCH, these five strategies are implemented through the following activities:

- **Screening and Assessment:** Alabama LAUNCH helped to expand the state's [Help Me Grow \(HMG\)](#) program to the western part of the state, which includes Tuscaloosa County. HMG promotes and provides support for the use of the [Ages and Stages Questionnaire® \(ASQ3™\)](#) and [Ages & Stages Questionnaire®: Social–Emotional \(ASQ:SE™\)](#) in pediatric care settings, early childhood settings such as Early Head Start, Head Start, and Home Visitation programs. Alabama LAUNCH is conducting professional development and training on the screening tools, providing technical support and follow up for professionals who have been trained on the tools and raising public awareness about the importance of children's social-emotional development. Through a partnership with the [Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#), Alabama LAUNCH has also established relationships with local pediatricians and is training them in the ASQ3™. Pediatricians are now using the ASQ3™ during well child visits and making referrals to HMG when appropriate.
- **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:** Alabama LAUNCH funds early childhood mental health consultations (ECMHCs) for families and staff in child care and early care and education programs. Two mental health consultants are providing training to Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) staff, administration, and families. The mental health consultants are also providing reflective supervision and consultation for HS/EHS and early intervention staff. In addition, Alabama LAUNCH has developed the Alabama Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) Model, or Ecological Systems Perspective, which focuses on the continuum of promotion (program focused), prevention (classroom/teacher focused), and intervention (child/family and home visitor/early intervention focused). It was developed as a

mixed-methods model and incorporates guidance from Georgetown University as well as the Center on Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning’s [Pyramid Model](#). IECMHC Model A will eventually be adopted by the state. Alabama LAUNCH is also developing webinars for primary care providers focused on social-emotional development, children with autism, children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and other behavioral concerns. Furthermore, along with funding from the Kellogg Foundation, LAUNCH supported the Alabama Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health to become a licensed affiliate of the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health® and adopted the Competency Guidelines® and Endorsement® for Culturally Sensitive, Relationship-Focused Practice Promoting Infant Mental Health®, created by the Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health.

- **Integrating Behavioral Health into Primary Care:** With the establishment of a Young Child Wellness subcommittee for IECMHC, Alabama LAUNCH is working to identify effective strategies for integrating behavioral health into primary care. Alabama Project LAUNCH plans to start making ECMHC available in pediatric primary care settings in the fall of 2017. Alabama LAUNCH’s work to expand HMG in the state has already contributed to an increase in the number of referrals from physicians, especially related to children’s socio-emotional wellbeing. Alabama LAUNCH’s strong working relationship with the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has also provided opportunities to increase awareness and provide screenings in the community through various public events.
- **Enhancing Home Visiting:** Alabama LAUNCH is currently working with the [Nurse Family Partnership](#), [Parents as Teachers](#) programs of [Easter Seals West Alabama](#), and [Tuscaloosa One Place](#) to enhance and expand home visiting services. They have developed training programs for staff, including four mental health modules for home visiting staff and professional development in crisis intervention. Home visiting directors and supervisors are also being trained in and are participating in reflective practice groups and supervision.
- **Family Strengthening:** Alabama LAUNCH is using the Strengthening Families framework and activities to promote strengths-based protective factors that help build resilience in young children and families. In 2016, the local LAUNCH implementation site held a Strengthening Families training for 18 early childhood professionals and a one-day training for six LAUNCH team members. They also held other community trainings and events for families, including a Smart and Secure Child class for parents and a Read and Romp Tuscaloosa event, which 923 adults and children attended. For the event, Alabama LAUNCH provided to community members 400 bags of new books that included parenting and literacy information as well as information on how to join the local Young Child Wellness Council, Alabama LAUNCH, and HMG program. Alabama LAUNCH has implemented the Smart and Secure Child curriculum, a 12-week program developed by the Satcher Institute of Health at Morehouse College. Families are often recruited through Parent Cafés.

### **Systems Integration**

Project LAUNCH is intended to improve coordination and collaboration across systems that serve young children and their families. Toward this goal, Alabama LAUNCH hosted the third annual state-wide Professional Development Institute and Summit in May 2017. The Summit attracts state agency leaders, government officials, policy makers, pediatricians, social workers, as well as direct service providers in the early childhood workforce.

At the local level, collaboration with organizations and associations has allowed Alabama Project LAUNCH to expand services to many more families. For example, their partnership with the Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has allowed an additional 1,620 children in the Tuscaloosa County area to be screened in pediatric offices with the ASQ3™. Through this program, an additional 1,093 children have also been screened for autism by pediatricians using the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers.

### ***Vignette***

Alabama LAUNCH has provided trainings to HS/EHS on the ASQ™. Teachers are now using this tool in their programs to screen every child who is enrolled. Teachers and administrators at HS/EHS have reported that they feel more knowledgeable about the screener, more comfortable using the screener and speaking to parents or caregivers about the results, and better equipped to identify children who are most at risk for developmental delays and social-emotional concerns. Through Project LAUNCH, these facilities now have access to the early childhood mental health consultant to provide support and resources for teachers and administrators when needed.

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