



# ALLEGHENY COUNTY

ALWAYS INSPIRING

## Inaugural Director Department of Children's Initiatives Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

*With a mission to improve access for all children across Allegheny County to high-quality early learning and out-of-school time programs.*

### **The Search**

Allegheny County, a region serving more than 1.2 million residents in 130 municipalities, seeks a Director to lead a new County Department dedicated to children. The Department's mission will be to improve access for all children in Allegheny County to high-quality early learning and out-of-school time programs. Early learning takes place from birth to the time a child enters kindergarten. Out-of-school time programs serve children and teens and encompass after-school programs that run until after regular work hours and after school on half-days, as well as summer programming that takes place during the months school is not in session.

The Director is expected to become a champion for children in the County, building a department that will become the go-to resource for comprehensive information on early learning and out-of-school time. It will be designed to be laser-focused on how best to bridge gaps; coordinate, attract, and leverage resources; expand equitable access regardless of geography, race, income, and other factors; track outcomes; and ensure high quality standards. Over time, the aspiration is to establish Allegheny County as a national leader in high-quality children's programming, underpinned by commitments to advancing equity, increasing access, and prioritizing accountability.

The position calls for a strategic, highly collaborative leader and spokesperson who is excited about the challenge of building a government department from the ground up. Candidates must be able to engage productively with a wide array of stakeholders and must bring the professional experience and expertise to serve as a credible and effective advocate on behalf of children and families.

Allegheny County is working with the national executive search firm, Isaacson, Miller on this recruitment. All inquiries and applications should be directed in confidence to Isaacson, Miller as indicated at the end of this document.

### **Background**

Strategically located in the heart of the Mid-Atlantic states, with Pittsburgh as the city center, Allegheny County, a Home Rule government, serves approximately 1.2 million residents within its jurisdiction. The County, which has a nearly one billion dollar operating budget, provides a myriad of services including health and human services, parks and recreation, public works, and economic development. The County has an elected County Executive and an elected 15-member County Council.

In early 2019, the County Executive convened a 26-member Working Group to analyze the state of early learning and out-of-school time programming in Allegheny County and make recommendations about how a potential county-wide fund to bolster early learning and out-of-school time programs might work. The Children's Fund Working Group, which comprised professionals and stakeholders across the County, engaged in intensive outreach, public engagement, and research over a six-month period and presented a [comprehensive report](#) to the Executive in late October 2019.

The Working Group found significant gaps in equitable access to early learning and out-of-school time programs and concluded that a focus on improving the quality of existing programs and creating greater capacity within the system would provide significant short and long-term benefit to communities. It reported that in 2018-19, 74% of children ages three and four did not have access to publicly funded high-quality pre-K programs, and across Allegheny County, 70% of children are not served by out-of-school time programs. The report asserted that investments in high-quality early learning and out-of-school time programs yield great benefits for children, families, and taxpayers, and in turn that the negative economic and societal consequences of not providing these services are stark. It cited research showing investments in early education and after-school programs pay for themselves at least three times over by increasing children's earning potential as adults, and by reducing the number of students repeating grades, needing special education, dropping out of high school, and becoming involved in the criminal legal system. Moreover, parents and caregivers of these children are better able to fully participate in the workforce and provide for themselves and their families.

The report noted that the Departments of Human services and Health are charged with addressing the human services needs and health needs of all county residents. While they conduct extremely valuable work on behalf of children with emergent or long-term needs, their mandates encompass a much wider range of issues for smaller populations of children. The Working Group therefore recommended a new department be established within the Allegheny County government to be a champion for children, ensuring every child across the County has access to—and is able to benefit from—high-quality early learning and out-of-school time programs. It envisioned a department with one universal constituency – children. The report also emphasized the importance of the Department operating with core principles of equity, access, quality, and accountability.

### **Department of Children's Initiatives**

Following careful review of the Children's Fund Working Group Report, the County Executive recommended creating a new County Department and requested that the County Manager recruit a founding Director to take the position in early 2021. The Department of Children's Initiatives will lead and support systemwide improvements for children and families across the County. It will work in close collaboration with the County's departments of health and human services, among other departments that interface with children and teens, and will engage a wide array of stakeholders.

The goals of the Department of Children's Initiatives are:

- Expansion of high-quality early learning for children by supporting existing and emerging high-quality providers to ensure more Allegheny County children are receiving the best possible early learning programs;
- Systemic improvement of the out-of-school time sector by improving the quality of standards and increasing the availability of high-quality out-of-school time programming;
- Establishing Allegheny County as a national leader in children's programming by championing high-quality children's programming at the County level, engaging Allegheny County residents in all aspects of the work, recognizing workforce issues and leveraging resources to improve training standards and career opportunities, and aligning and collaborating with state and federal departments.

It is expected that the Department will accomplish these goals through some or all of the following efforts:

- Existing providers of early learning and out-of-school time programs will improve to meet quality standards; existing high-quality providers will increase the number of children they serve; and new providers will be established and set themselves up to meet quality standards;

- Existing or emerging high-quality providers will receive assistance to offer affordable prices; existing and emerging high-quality providers will have the capacity to serve more children; and families will be able to reach high-quality providers without excessive travel;
- The Department will collect pertinent information for priority-setting as part of provider outreach and as a condition of funding. This data will allow the Department to report out to the public on the state of the system and plans for improvement.

## **Director**

The Director will report to the Allegheny County Manager, William McKain, and will help build the Department from scratch, setting the strategy, structure, and budget; serving as a public spokesperson for the Department and its mission; building strong partnerships; mapping the provider landscape; elevating important and relevant policy issues; magnifying current successful programming and identifying gaps; setting up data systems to track outcomes; and pursuing opportunities for state and federal support to leverage County and philanthropic resources.

Major responsibilities for the Director will include:

- Engaging key stakeholders in the creation of a five-year strategic plan to ensure all children will have access to high quality early learning and out-of-school time programming;
- Operationalizing the Department to include developing and implementing all operating procedures, guidelines on quality standards, and a process for disbursing funds to support high-quality early learning and out-of-school time programming;
- Ensuring funding is allocated in a manner that targets constituencies that have barriers to access, including ability, race, income, and geography;
- Advising the County Manager and preparing budgets aligned to the strategic plan, goals, and outcomes;
- Promoting productive cross-departmental collaboration, especially with Allegheny County Departments of Human Services and of Health;
- Encouraging all departments of Allegheny County to consider children in all aspects of their work;
- Cultivating and maintaining collaboration with a broad array of external stakeholders to achieve goals and objectives;
- Working closely with the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Pennsylvania Department of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Health, and other relevant state and federal departments;
- Overseeing the Department's engagement strategies with stakeholders, elected officials, business leaders, and others in advocacy activities to promote policies that support children and families;
- Directing the development of timely and persuasive information describing the countywide trends for children and families, collaborating with other agencies as needed. This will include the production and dissemination of an annual report to the public;
- Ensuring timely communication of overall impact of programs and activities, and ensuring the results of program monitoring and evaluation inform future strategic direction;
- Tracking and communicating to appropriate audiences new and updated information and research relating to early childhood development, early childhood education, child health, youth programming, and related areas;
- Designing and implementing a comprehensive communications plan that supports the Department's strategic plan and outlines external and internal communications goals;
- Managing and helping to develop effective departmental staff.

## Qualifications and Experience

For this important role, the County seeks the following:

- A strategic thinker with experience and knowledge related to quality early care and/or youth education programs and systems;
- A deft problem-solver who can quickly adapt to changing needs and opportunities;
- A strong analytic thinker who excels at using data to create persuasive information;
- A skillful collaborator and consensus-builder; and
- An outstanding communicator.

Preferred qualifications include:

- A successful track record of setting strategy and leading and implementing large-scale change;
- At least seven to ten years of leadership experience in early childhood, youth serving, and/or human services/education sectors;
- Knowledge of trends, policies, and other issues relating to children and families, such as child health, early childhood education, child development, and family support;
- Experience with policymaking and advocacy at local, state, and/or federal levels;
- The ability to deliver results that are both effective and timely;
- Strong analytical capacities, particularly in determining the alignment between information and need;
- Demonstrated experience in developing budgets and using financial reports to monitor and manage budgets;
- Experience creatively and strategically using data to inform decision-making and both engage and persuade public opinion;
- Understanding of and experience with relevant governmental funding streams;
- Open-mindedness, outstanding listening skills, and respect for different perspectives and backgrounds. Genuine and demonstrated commitment to equity and cultural humility;
- Comfort and experience with maintaining a public presence. Strong writing and presentation skills to wide-ranging audiences.
- Bachelor's degree required. Advanced degree in a relevant field such as education, public policy, or public health would be an asset.

### For more information or to apply:

Inquiries, nominations/referrals, and applications (including resumes and 1-3-page letter of interest) should be sent to:

Karen Wilcox and Tatiana Oberkoetter  
[www.imsearch.com/7579](http://www.imsearch.com/7579)

Isaacson, Miller  
263 Summer St  
Boston, MA 02210

Applications will be held in strict confidence.

*Allegheny County does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of a protected class including: race; color; religion; national origin; sex; gender identity or expression; sexual orientation; disability; age; or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law.*