

Early Childhood Advisory Council
December 14, 2010
Date Approved: Draft – Not yet approved

Meeting Notes

In Attendance: Maureen Seiwert (Early Childhood Education, Minneapolis Public Schools), Mary Vanderwert (State Head Start Collaboration), Tom Holton (Community Education, Bloomington/Richfield), Arthur Reynolds (Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota (U or M)), Maggie Diebel (Minnesota Department of Health), Stephanie Corradi (Parent), Sandy Simar (Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties, Head Start), Julie Sjordal (St. David's Child Development), Sarah Caruso (Greater Twin Cities United Way), Julie Leslie (Augustana Preschool), Representative Nora Slawik (Minnesota House, Legislative District 55B), Erin Sullivan-Sutton (Department of Human Services), Karen Carlson (Minnesota Department of Education), Senator Terri Bonoff (Minnesota Senate, Legislative District 43), Joe Nathan (Macalester College), Andy Chen (Parent)

Unable to attend: Senator Geoff Michel (Minnesota Senate, Legislative District 41) and Representative Randy Demmer (Minnesota House, Legislative District 29A)

Staff: Kelly Monson (Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)), Lisa Backer (Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)), Candy Kragthorpe (MDH), Nancy Kaczrowski (MDE), Amanda Varley (MDE), and Kara Hall (MDE)

Public: Megan Waltz (Build), Sandy Myers (Resources for Child Caring), Eric Haugee (Ready4K), Nancy Jost (West Central Initiative) Steph Clothier (National Council for State Legislators), Jackie Felt (St Paul Public Schools), Pete Noll (Minnesota Catholic Conference), Carol Miller (Hennepin County), Richard Chase (Wilder), Jennifer Barshace (Parents as Teachers), Matthew Collie (House of Representatives), Sara Benzkofer (House of Representatives), Jennifer Valorse (Wilder Research), Andi Egbert (Wilder Research), Karen Kingsley (Ready4K), Karen Cadigan (U of M, Children, Youth and Family Consortium),

1. Welcome, Review Agenda and Introductions

Sarah Caruso, Chair, thanked people for their dedication to the issues. She expressed her gratitude for the efforts of Council and Committee members. The agenda and meeting objectives were reviewed.

Sarah outlined a memo she is sending to Governor Elect Dayton. It highlights the work of the Council and administrative issues such as the need for a new executive order and appointments of new members.

2. Approve Minutes from October Meeting

Stephanie Corradi made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held October 12, 2010. Julie Sjordal seconded the motion. The motion carried.

3. Action items:

A. Report Card

Sandy Myers (Accountability Co-chair) provided background and context for the work being done on the Statewide School Readiness Report Card. She reminded the group that legislation charged the Council to make recommendations regarding the creation of a statewide school readiness system wide report card. A contractor was hired to work with and build on the past work of the accountability Committee.

Richard Chase (Contractor and Consulting Scientist with Wilder Research) described the process used to arrive at the proposed indicators. The contractors have looked at work done in other states; draft indicators were reviewed by national experts; and the list of indicators were prioritized by the Accountability Committee. The contractors took comments from the Access and Finance Committee, at public comment meetings and through a survey. In general, there was a great deal of support for the indicators and suggestions made for additional indicators to be considered when data becomes available.

The indicators that are being recommended have been selected based on a set of criteria including that there is a current, reliable source of data that can be collected annually. The indicators have been divided into six categories including Educational Preparation, Healthy Development, Supported Families, Health Services and Systems, Early Care and Education Services and Systems, and Context. In the report card the child and family indicators are separated from the system indicators as required in the legislation. The final category includes context indicators such as expenditures and demographics.

Discussion:

- The report will include recommendations regarding the review of indicators, how to make changes, and regular reporting of the information.
- In the Education Preparation category, there are a lot of indicators of readiness. Concerns were listed regarding listing personal-social indicators separately. Legislators reported getting the most push back from the general public on personal-social issues which could jeopardize the entire project. The composite score in #1 includes all domains and describes successful learners.
- Indicator #2 does not meet the positive language set as a standard for indicators by the Council. The contractors are asked to put all indicators in the positive.
- Also need to add indicators on language and math which are most predictive of MCA grade three test scores.
- A recommendation was made to use proficiency language as defined by MDE around language and literacy, math, and personal and social areas of development.
- The contractor was encouraged to identify the most useful indicators to use as a dashboard. The list of top indicators will go back to the Committee to determine the key indicators for use on the dashboard. The Council indicated support for the

context indicators but suggest drawing a clear line between the five pentagons areas and the context. The Council urged the contractors to keep the report card easy to understand.

- The Council encouraged the contractor to identify which indicators directly effect school readiness.

Sandy Myers made a motion on behalf of the Accountability Committee to adopt the Statewide School Readiness Report Card Report and Indicators taking the Council comments and reflecting them in the final document.

Joe Nathan seconded the motion.

Further discussion: Some Council members commented on how important it is to consider the information being presented and how it might be perceived as intervening in the lives of families. Other members drew attention to the research and information about the importance of social and personal area of development.

Time will be set aside on at the March meeting to review the final report card to be recommended to the legislature to ensure the comments of the Council were incorporated.

The motion passed unanimously.

B. Office of Early Learning

Karen Cadigan and Stephanie Clotheir (Contractors) reported on the work done to date by the Office of Early Learning (OEL) Task Force. The contractors reminded the Council that legislation was passed last session that mandated the creation of a task force that would make recommendations on the creation of an Office of Early Learning. The Contractors have facilitated task force discussions, conducted public comment meetings, and hosted an online survey, and gathered information from other states and what Minnesota has already done.

They have focused on a number of key concepts including:

- function over form
- authority and responsibility
- scope of programs
- co-location
- contracting back from other agencies
- administrative vs legislative routes

Four structural options were considered: leadership in the governor's office, leadership within a single existing agency, a director with responsibilities across two exiting agencies, and creating a separate freestanding office or department.

The Task Force has determined that there is a need for the office to have authority to make effective changes. The proposed scope of programs include the following:

- Early Childhood Family Education
- Early Childhood Screening
- Early Childhood Special Education
- Head Start/Early Head Start
- School Readiness Program
- School Readiness Study
- Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant
- Family Home Visiting
- Child Care Assistance Program
- Child Care Development Grants:
 - Early Childhood Facilities and Financing
 - Quality Rating and Improvement System
 - School Readiness Connections

The Task Force will continue its work with one of the next steps being continued discussion regarding collocation.

Discussion:

- Task force is interested in making a bold recommendation.
- The notion of physical collocation is a struggle for the Legislature especially given the cost involved in physically moving staff and infrastructure costs which would be incurred.
- A concern was voiced that by reducing the number of agencies involved in early childhood related programs, the attention to issues may be diminished.
- Some Council members urged the Task Force to take the political climate into consideration. May be trying to create a new office this at a time of reduction in state government. Another point of view expressed suggested that this is a shift rather growing state government.
- Concerns regarding the functional priorities were expressed by Maggie Deibel as a representative of the Department of Health. She recommended looking at broader system development.
- Concerns were expressed regarding ensuring that the creation of an Office won't take money from children and families.
- Time of tight resources provides opportunity for innovation including using virtual methods of collocation.

Maureen Seiwert made a motion to adopt the recommendation for an Office of Early Learning headed by a cabinet level position with authority and responsibility for policy, fiscal, and rule making with the scope of programs defined by the task force. Legislation to create an OEL and transfer programs and staff as well as interim steps to phase in implementation will be identified as part of the recommendations.

Sandy Simar seconded.

Further discussion included a question regarding the extent to which an OEL have experts in kindergarten –grade 3. Attention is needed for preparing children for school as well as for schools preparing for children. The contractors were encouraged to include the transition to school as part of report.

Amendment to the motion: report will reflect the discussion of the Council.

Motion carries.

C. Access and Finance

Arthur Reynolds presented information developed by the Access and Finance Committee regarding school readiness proficiency rates and increased participation rates which will help achieve the 2020 readiness goal.

A working definition of school readiness is as follows:

The consistent demonstration of mastery or proficiency in skills, behaviors, and attitudes that promote successful transition to kindergarten and are instrumental (predictive) for optimal learning and achievement. These skills and behaviors include the domains of language, literacy, math, socio-emotional development, the arts, and physical health. Proficiency in multiple domains is especially beneficial for smooth transitions to kindergarten.

Recommendations:

1. Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) establishes a definition of school-ready proficiency. The overall index is the 75% standard of total points from the Work Sampling System tool or a comparable standard on another approved tool representing all domains of performance.
2. ECAC identifies key indicators for documenting participation in early childhood programs. The indicators include:
 - a. Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds in publicly funded preschool or prekindergarten programs,
 - b. Percentage of 3-and 4-year olds in state financed preschool or prekindergarten programs, and
 - c. Percentage of 3- and 4-year olds in programs identified as relatively high in quality (e.g. NAEYC accredited).
3. ECAC identifies key indicators for assessing state-level resource investments in early childhood programs. Four indicators are recommended:
 - a. Total state and federal (public) expenditures per child 0-5,
 - b. State expenditure per child 0-5,
 - c. Total state and federal (public) expenditures per enrolled child, and
 - d. Percentage share of the overall public resources for early childhood programs from birth to 5 contributed by the state.
4. ECAC will implement a process through which many complementary activities are coordinated. These include analysis of costs, of program components, analysis of effectiveness of programs and components in Minnesota and other states, cost-effectiveness documentation and analysis, the identification of magnitudes of the

gaps between current levels of school readiness and the 2020 goal and feasibility. The elements and components having the strongest evidence for increasing school readiness levels will be prioritized for increasing access and resource investments within the larger system components. Identified benchmarks may vary over time and may be adjusted to meet the 2020 readiness goal.

Discussion:

- How will the council use the indicators? The indicators will be used to track progress and determine where investments should be made.
- Use in decisions regarding budget based outcomes. The indicators will help make sure that public dollars are spent in ways that are effective.
- What kind of a lag time will there be before we see the results of our investments? There is a high likelihood you will see improvement by the end of the program year when a program incorporates the 10 Essential Elements.
- Progress made toward these indicators combined with the report card can be part of the ECAC report each year.
- What evidence is there of cost and effectiveness of programs? Minnesota will need to make decisions about when to make short and long term investments. In analyzing information we need to recognize the synergy between some of the investments and their benefits when certain sets of experiences come together.

Arthur Reynolds made the motion from the Access and Finance Committee to adopt the four benchmarking recommendations prepared by the committee and provided in the agenda packet. The committee asks that the Council adopt these recommendations.

Karen Carlson seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The Committee was encouraged to simplify the language of the recommendations for the use by the general public.

4. Reports

A. Comprehensive Planning Process

Julie Sjoldal reported on the process being used to create a comprehensive early childhood system plan. She reminded the Council of the motion made at the October meeting to move ahead in creating a comprehensive plan. The effort includes pulling together all the work that is currently being done by ECAC as well as other community groups looking at systems. A Guidance Team has been created to staff the planning process. They are relying on a planning group which includes other community initiatives that have plans for system building and one chair from each of the ECAC committees. A framework for the plan has been drafted using the report card as a starting place. Four categories will be included: Education Preparation, Healthy Development, Supported Families, and Coordination and Funding. One of

the next steps is to collect the plans and committee work to cut and paste into the framework.

A meeting of ECAC, the Planning Team, and committee chairs and staff is being planned for the morning of January 31. Full community wide participation will be scheduled at a later date.

Concern was expressed regarding whether this is a parallel process to what the Council is doing. Julie reiterated that the intent is to bring together the work of the Council and other groups.

B. Common Program Standards update

Eileen Nelson (MDE, representing the cross agency team that is working on the Quality Rating and Improvement System recommendation). Eileen reminded the group that the Early Learning Standards Committee is charged with making a recommendation on improvements for common program standards. Agencies are also charged with establishing a common framework for program standards.

A contractor has been hired using the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to facilitate the public input process. In person workshops and public comment meetings with some specific to new immigrants and communities of color were held. An online survey yielded over 600 responses. The draft document is now being revised based on the feedback received. Next the cross agency group will complete their recommendations and submit then to the legislature. The report will also go to the Early Learning Standards Committee to inform their work on common program standards.

Discussion:

- A question was asked regarding how this work is woven with findings from Minnesota Early Learning Foundation (MELF). The cross agency group sought national expert feedback as well as considered the MELF evaluation of Parent Aware. A suggestion was made that the group draw connections between this work and that of MELF. There was a reminder that there are some things a private group, such as MELF, can advocate for that state agencies can not.
- It may be that the financing needs to be legislated but not the common standards and indicators.
- The question was raised if the indicators measure the dose and intensity that is needed to be effective as indicated in the 10 Essential Elements. The cross agency group will review the public comment and the connection between indicators and improvements in school readiness.

There were no public comments. The meeting was adjourned.