



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING  
Wednesday, March 10, 2021**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, March 10, 2021.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse; Vice Chair Worthington; Members Gordon, Alvarez, Wren, Huston, Paver, Bliss Lima, and Conlin

Staff in attendance: Rachel Farley, Cindy Gamez, Mary Jamsek

**CALL TO ORDER** – Chair McHorse called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m.

**CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL** - None

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from** - Member Conlin moved to approve the February 10, 2021 meeting minutes and member Huston seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously by a vote of 8-0 (Vice Chair Worthington off the dais)

### **2. PRESENTATION**

#### **a. Women, Infants, and Children program- Diana Flores, WIC Community Engagement Coordinator, Austin Public Health**

WIC is the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. The local WIC program provides services in Travis and Bastrop counties. Ms. Flores explained the WIC mission- to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children who are at nutritional risk. WIC provides nutrition education, health assessments, breastfeeding support, referrals to healthcare and other resources in the community using ConnectATX, and supplemental nutritious foods each month. Food provided varies by whether someone is pregnant, breastfeeding, or formula feeding. Exclusively breastfeeding mothers receive the largest food package. Formula is provided for moms who decide to use it.

Ms. Flores explained how WIC is operating during the pandemic. WIC clinics had to close due to the pandemic. Clients are being supported through alternative service models. WIC provides nutrition and breastfeeding education every 3 months through individual or group classes and participants get their benefits cards reloaded every 3 months. WIC installed drop boxes outside of each clinic. Participants drop off their cards and WIC reloads benefits and mails them the cards.

Communication with clients has been a challenge during the pandemic. Each WIC clinic has its own email account. WIC also has 2-way texting software. There is a new patient portal where clients can upload documents. WIC now has a mobile unit serving Austin and Elgin/Manor and is working to add locations to help bring services to where clients are. WIC has a Facebook group, ATX Family Care, which has increased from 171 members in April 2020 to 7,000 members in March 2021. Mom's Place, a lactation support and training center, has been closed during the pandemic but is providing online consultations. The Shopping and Delivery Program provides home delivery for qualifying clients in Travis County, Del Valle, Creedmoor, and Cedar Creek during the pandemic. There is no federal or state funding for this; it is funded through City of Austin general funds.

ECC members asked if WIC has gained or lost clients during the pandemic. Ms. Flores said participation has increased and they receive between 20 and 50 applications a day. ECC members asked how they can advocate to support WIC. Ms. Flores noted that service delivery is limited by the number of WIC staff. ECC members expressed an interest in supporting any necessary policy changes that could help WIC continue innovative practices that increase access to services, like virtual visits and texting, after the pandemic.

### **3. NEW BUSINESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS**

#### **a. Early Childhood Council 2021 goals**

It was noted that ECC work groups could continue discussing this topic and propose specific goals at a future ECC meeting.

#### **b. Policy Work Group Updates – Anna Lisa Conlin and Cathy McHorse**

##### **i. State child care system updates**

Chair McHorse provided updates on \$1 billion in forthcoming child care relief funding for licensed and registered programs through grants administered by the Texas Workforce Commission from TWC; the American Rescue Act which could provide \$2 billion in funding to Texas for child care stabilization and could be used to serve more children and improve quality; and bills filed in the Texas legislature, including one that would require that any program serving children receiving child care subsidies participate in Texas Rising Star, the state quality rating system. She also spoke about a child care rally focused on state policy advocacy hosted by Children at Risk.

##### **ii. Best Place for Working Parents initiative**

Chair McHorse provided an update on this initiative which has certified 98 companies as being a Best Place for Working Families. Information will be given to these companies to share with their employees about Bright By Text and Pre-K enrollment.

##### **iii. Meetings with Mayor and Council offices**

The Success by 6 Coalition (SX6) will schedule Council visits for each ECC member and SX6 volunteers.

#### **c. City Budget recommendations**

**i. Maintain current Austin Public Health funding for early childhood-** The recommendation passed unanimously by a vote of 7-0 (Vice Chair Worthington and Member Bliss Lima off the dais)

**ii. Consider repurposing Pre-K classroom funding to Pre-K partnerships administrative hub-** The recommendation passed by a vote of 6-0 with Chair McHorse abstaining (Vice Chair Worthington and Member Bliss Lima off the dais)

**iii. Council recommendation- Prioritize affordable housing proposals that include high quality child care-** The recommendation passed unanimously by a vote of 7-0 (Vice Chair Worthington and Member Bliss Lima off the dais)

#### **d. Principles guiding the focus of the Community Engagement Work Group**

Member Gordon shared principles guiding the work of this group:

- Build authentic, two-way paths of communication between the greater Austin community and the ECC by hearing directly from the community about their specific needs
- Amplify community voice and perspectives
- Actively demonstrate transparency through proactive communication with the community; allow space for review and debrief

#### **e. Topics to bring to Joint Inclusion Committee**

Member Alvarez noted that he was appointed to the committee in January but the committee has not met since November. Staff will try to find out when the committee will meet next.

#### **4. STAFF UPDATES**

- a. Vaccines for child care workforce- Austin Public Health staff have been working with child care center directors to make vaccine appointments for their employees. We have also been making appointments for child care home providers. APH will continue to update the ECC on these efforts.

#### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- The Housing and Planning Department will present on the Action Plan in April. ECC asks that they provide data broken specific to children or families with young children/children data presented through an equity lens.
- Updates from the Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Child Care Task Force
- AVANCE and Go Austin Vamos Austin work family child care programs

**ADJOURNMENT** – Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 9:40 a.m.