



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES**

**SPECIAL CALLED MEETING  
Monday, August 16, 2021**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Monday, August 16, 2021.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse; Members Gordon, Alvarez, Wren, Huston, Paver, Hedrick, and Conlin

Staff in attendance: Rachel Farley, Caitlin Oliver

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

**CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL** – No citizen communication

1. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES from June 9, 2021 meeting** – Member Hedrick moved to approve the minutes. Member Huston seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by a vote of 7-0

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

### **a. Policy Work Group updates**

- i. American Rescue Plan Act funding- Anna Lisa Conlin

Member Conlin reported that Travis County approved 15 months of ARPA funding and will then reassess future funding. Can be used for up to 3 years, with 15-month assessment periods. The approved funding matches the original Success by 6 recommendations. Staff liaison Rachel Farley added that the recommendations for the extension of existing funding may move more quickly. Of the recommendations that are new funding, the Del Valle ISD interlocal agreement (ILA) is the farthest along. Chair McHorse encouraged attendees to extend a thank you to their City Council member for approving the ARPA funding for early childhood.

- ii. U.S. Chamber of Commerce report on lack of affordable child care- Tom Hedrick

Member Hedrick updated members about two forthcoming studies that report on the economic consequences of inadequate child care in Texas. The studies look at both the availability of child care seats available and quality of programs. The Ready Nation (subgroup of Council for a Strong America) report estimates a \$3.5-4 billion cost to Texas in the pre-natal to 3 arena. This report is to be published soon. Uncertain on when the US Chamber of Commerce report will be released. It addresses pre-natal to 6, and estimates a cost that is roughly double that of the Ready Nation report. The variables that go into calculating the economic costs are things like: Getting parents back to work and how child care relates to that; Parents that would have to stay home can now work; Parents who are working will be this much more productive and won't miss work; Productivity and breakdowns in child care and absences due to child care, etc. According to the

Texas Workforce Commission, participation in the workforce by parents with kids under 5 y/o is low compared to other states. We can share these reports with City Council members when they are released

iii. **St. John's community development- Sebastian Wren**

Member Wren provided updates to members about the City development on the I-35 and St. Johns old Home Depot property. The City is forming a commission of residents who will help to guide that redevelopment. High quality child care could be a part of the development if this commission wants it to be. Would be good to reach out to the commission to increase their awareness of high quality child care in Austin.

**b. Community Engagement Work Group members- Eliza Gordon**

Member Gordon informed the members that the July meeting got rescheduled. The group will plan to meet again in August on the last Tuesday of the month, August 31, from 3:30-4:30 p.m. Gordon will follow up from where we left things from the ECC meeting with community participation in May. The group will also talk about recruitment for the workgroup for sustainability and diverse voices. Speaking to everyone in attendance at the ECC meeting, Member Gordon extended an invitation to all to participate in the workgroup (parents, community members, providers, any EC stakeholders).

**c. Winter Storm Review Task Force final report update- Aletha Huston**

Member Huston gave updates to the members about the final report which has been submitted and is to be presented to the City Council (maybe as early as August 24, 2021). Huston will send the link to the report to staff liaison Rachel Farley to share with the ECC members. In summary, there were a lot of gaps in the services that should have happened. The final document is a report to the City, but the disaster response was only under limited control of the City. The ECC members extended a thank you to Member Huston for sitting on the Winter Storm Review Task Force on behalf of the ECC.

**d. Joint Inclusion Committee updates- Raul Alvarez**

i. **Budget proposals adopted by JIC**

Member Alvarez updated the members on recent JIC meetings. In April 2021, the posted JIC meeting agenda focused on ARPA. In May, JIC members could not vote on budget stuff because it was not posted on agenda. Alvarez reported that it is interesting to be a part of JIC with representatives from all these other commissions with array of perspectives. The JIC is interested in intersectional issues- those that cut across various areas of need in our community. For example, in recent meetings there has been an interest to focus on issues like the digital divide and language access.

ii. **ECC topics to take to JIC**

ECC members encouraged Member Alvarez to extend to the different commissions the information about the Community Engagement workgroup if they want to come share with that workgroup.

### **3. STAFF UPDATES**

**a. COVID-19 Stage of Risk and child care and schools response**

Staff liaison Rachel Farley (APH program coordinator) reported that the City is in Stage 5 of Austin Public Health risk-based guidelines. This move to stage 5 is based on the increasing hospitalization and cases in the area. Health Authority/APH recommendation is that age 2 and over mask when out in public and indoors. City/County Orders that went into effect on August 11, 2021, is that masks are required for those over age 2 on City and County properties. Masks required in public schools, including public charter schools. Each school district has developed a local reporting mechanism, and all school districts are required to report COVID-19 cases to the City and County.

At end of staff updates, members asked for source for data on COVID-19 cases among young children and in child care. APH staff will follow up with link to the DSHS data. Member Paver reported on her child care centers in Williamson County, Kyle, and Buda, saying numbers of COVID-19 cases in children in child care is highest since March 2020. Paver also mentioned that child care centers are required to notify Health Department of cases and she expressed concern about numbers of unvaccinated teachers, parent anxiety about putting child in child care with rising cases, and a struggle to find staff for centers.

**b. Rental Housing Development Assistance (RHDA) Program application scoring**

In February, the Housing and Planning Department adopted revised guidelines for the RHDA program that provided more clarity for applicants on how the Austin Housing Finance Corporation will negotiate and monitor loans. The next step is to review the application and review process. Currently, applications for RHDA funds for developments that serve families (rather than single-room-occupancies or senior facilities) are scored upon the number of multi-bedroom units they provide. They have discussed increasing our minimum standards for applicants, such as requiring child care services for a family development if located in a “child care desert.” APH, United Way, CM Tovo’s office and the Housing & Planning Department are working together on recommendations and discussing how they can best be implemented.

**c. Child care at Bergstrom Technology Center and Dove Springs Health Center**

Staff liaison Rachel Farley updated members that the child care operator at Bergstrom Tech Center is Kinder Care. They are preparing for a licensing visit at the end of this month and will open soon after that. The playground is currently under construction. There were some delays on the playground construction due to weather. The program already has had inquiries for care and has some children registered. Enrollment is open to children of City employees and community members, and there will be at least 10 seats reserved for children receiving a child care subsidy. Child care center at Dove Springs Public Health Center is currently in design phase for the interior of the center and have not yet started design phase for outdoor play area.

#### **4. PRESENTATIONS**

**a. Child Care Subsidies – Nicole Robinson, Director of Child Care Contracts, Workforce Solutions Capital Area**

The presentation covered 10 topics: Workforce Solutions (WFS) Capital Area child care services programmatic information, direct services, eligibility requirements, enrollment & recertification, application process, matching funds through local partnerships, continuity of care, special projects, quality initiatives, and community engagement. WFS Capital Area is the Texas

Workforce Development Board for the Capital Area and is responsible for the administration of the subsidized child care program in Travis County. Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the lead agency in Texas and has 28 local boards throughout Texas. The Child Care Services (CCS) program receives federal and state funding (Child Care and Development Block Grant Funding, or CCDBG) and is directed by federal, state, and local policies. Local boards can make rules that are more restrictive than the federal and state rules, but not broader than them. WFS invests in direct child care services and quality initiatives to support and align with the Success By Six strategic plan. WFS is required to procure a contractor every 5 years- in October 2021, will be entering into 3<sup>rd</sup> year of contract. Currently the CCS program is serving more than the target of 2,795 children per day.

There are 3 priority groups to receive child care services. Priority group 1- mandatory population that are guaranteed child care services (Choices, TANF, SNAP/E&T, Former Choices); Priority Group 2- discretionary population for which services are dependent on funding availability (in order of priority: children needing protective care, children of qualified veteran or qualified spouse, children of a foster youth, children experiencing homelessness, children of parents on military deployment, children of teen parents, and children with disabilities); Priority Group 3- determined at board level (In Travis County, Pre-K partnerships, former CPS, sibling of children currently receiving care, children of customers who are participating in TWC workforce funded programs, children of young adults between the ages of 16-24, City of Austin/Travis County referred families from high quality centers, and income eligible have received approval for services, depended on availability of funds.) Any quality rated centers can refer families to WFS as part of Priority Group 3.

Currently a total of 3,107 children are in care, of which 55% are in a 4 star rated center, 6% in 3 star, 17% in 2 star, and 22% in a non-Texas Rising Star (TRS) rated center. Eligibility for child care services includes that the child reside in Travis County, resides with parent(s), and is a US citizen or legal immigrant. If from a single parent household, the parent must be working or in training for at least 25 hours/week. In two parent household, the parents must maintain 50 hours/week combined. Household income cannot exceed 85% of state median income for their family size. Parents pay a share of the cost based on sliding scale base on income, family size, and number of children needing care.

Enrollment involves a checklist of required documentation like a valid ID, verification of address, birth certificate, income verification, etc. The child services enrollment packet has been reduced from 17 to 8 pages. Families can submit info by email, fax, mail or in person (where someone can help them scan documents). Can also call for assistance or visit on of 3 locations: Burleson Road (south location), Webberville at Austin Community College (east location), I-35 just south of Rundberg (main location). WFS Capital area encourages families to submit electronically because WFS is paperless. Families are notified that recertification is needed for continued services through USPS and email. Current enrollment is on pause due to waitlist. The oldest application is from May 2021, and there are 662 families (1035 children) that have applied since then.

Much of the funding for subsidized child care comes from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). A portion of that funding allocation from TWC relies on WFS Capital Area's

ability to get funding matches from local public or private entities, like City of Austin, Travis County, AISD, Austin Community College. WFS is able to draw down \$2 for every \$1 they are able to certify. Through a partnership with Travis County and City of Austin, WFS is able to fund child care continuity services (continuity of care) to support families in quality rated centers until they are eligible for CCDF or while they are trying to maintain their eligibility/if they need to do an upfront job search. In 2020, 446 children of the 1,579 families that lost their childcare scholarship were able to be served through this program. 19% of families served experienced a wage increase, and 100% of children remained in quality centers. Three types of COVID-19 response funding: CDBG-CV for City essential workers (enrollment and outreach is happening now), TWC service industry (arts, entertainment & recreation; accommodation & food services; and retail) recovery (SIR) funding, and CCDF upfront job search funding for families not meeting participation at the time of outreach for enrollment. Quality Child Care Collaborative (QC3) is cornerstone of WFS quality investments. QC3 provides free mentoring, training, technical assistance, and resources to help providers increase or achieve quality rating. Over \$2 million investment in QC3 from TWC, City, County, and United Way. Over the pandemic, over 50 providers have achieved TRS certification through WFS. There are 277 licensed child care centers, 21 licensed child care homes, 18 registered child care homes, and 6 relative care listed homes in the County; 182 Texas Rising Star Providers, 29 Texas School Ready Providers, and 54 nationally accredited providers.

WFS has provider and parent engagement opportunities, including a virtual parenting series (available on demand, and not yet in Spanish), monthly advisory meetings, and TRS director meetings. Currently WFS is working on a texting service for families to help move them through enrollment and recertification, videos on website to help parents with application/enrollment processes, and a provider payment portal. Also improving efficiency of workflow management and looking to expand contract slots, child care industry partnerships with United Way, and enhance customer service experience through trauma informed care training for staff.

ECC members asked where parents can communicate their concerns and provide feedback to improve program delivery and services. Robinson answered that WFS has been meeting with GAVA and have identified some families that need materials in languages other than English and Spanish. WFS also wants to host town hall style meetings to give opportunity for feedback in upcoming contract year. ECC members also asked about the enrollment process and whether any data is collected on how many families apply online versus calling, versus coming to office. Robinson said WFS can determine online submission, but she does not think they are tracking other methods. Majority of applications are online. Robinson was invited by ECC members to talk with the Community Engagement Workgroup.

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

The ECC members asked Nicole Robinson of Workforce Solutions Capital Area to come back to the September regular meeting for further Q&A. The September meeting date was incorrectly scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month. Staff liaison Farley is working to get the meeting rescheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month, September 8, 2021 at 8:30-10 a.m. Beginning with the September meeting, all Boards & Commissions meetings will be held in-person, so Farley is looking into the room reservations for the upcoming meetings this year and will send

updated calendar invitations to ECC members. Member Huston shared that the LBJ Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center is having a National Conference on PN3 Policy Summit on October 7, 2021, from 1 to 4 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT** – Chair McHorse adjourned at 10:02 a.m.