



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES

**REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, October 13, 2021**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, October 13, 2021.

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

Staff in attendance: Caitlin Oliver, Rachel Farley, and Donna Sundstrom

CALL TO ORDER – Chair McHorse called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m.

CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL – No citizen communication

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from September 8, 2021, meeting – Member Hedrick moved to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved by a vote of 9-0

2. NEW BUSINESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS

a. 2022 Early Childhood Council meeting calendar

Staff liaisons Farley and Oliver shared considerations for keeping the ECC regular meetings on the second Wednesday of the month at 8:30 a.m. for 2022. If the ECC were to schedule evening meetings for 2022, it may be more difficult to hold meetings at City Hall because many other Boards and Commissions have evening meetings. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECC considered a calendar with 2 evening meetings at locations that would be more convenient for community participation following requests for evening meetings from community organizations. Right now, all attendees must be in-person to participate. However, there is a City Council meeting agenda item to ask the City Manager to offer virtual options for Boards and Commissions meetings. Member Wren asked about having an ECC committee or workgroup meet in the evenings to get more community engagement. Member Gordon shared that the community engagement work group meets virtually from 3:30-4:40 p.m. If the ECC were to create a committee that would meet regularly, then the committee would need to post meeting agendas.

Chair McHorse suggested that the staff liaison confirm the rules for committees and workgroups and whether there are virtual options for committee meetings. She also suggested meeting in the evening for April, which is also the Month of the Young Child, and in August, because that is the month that the ECC meeting typically not able to meet at City Hall on Wednesday morning due to City budget meetings. All other months, the ECC would keep meetings at 8:30 a.m., the second Wednesday of the month. Members supported having two evening meetings and for having one meeting in North Austin and one south. Staff liaison

agreed to type up a proposed ECC 2022 meeting calendar with Tuesday evening meetings in April and August, for approval at the next meeting in November.

b. Brief updates on child care and pre-K systems in Austin- Cathy McHorse

Chair McHorse updated members that in September 2021 the Workforce Solutions accreditation report showed that three Texas Rising Star child care centers permanently closed. The closures were all related to an increase in rent or to the property being sold. Member Paver described the current child care staff shortage as one of the biggest crises the Austin community has seen. City Council is considering opportunities to support development and co-location of child care centers.

Chair McHorse said ECC can ask Workforce Solutions Capital Area if there is a tracking mechanism for where families find child care after a center closes. Member Conlin suggested a future agenda item to invite the Workforce Solutions workforce development to identify what the City could do to support a solution to the problem. Chair McHorse recommended that each ECC member include this topic in their individual updates to their City Council member. Member Paver would like the ECC members to position the Early Childhood Council as an empathic group where child care providers can share their concerns. Member Bliss Lima suggested that the ECC explore what tracking is done to see what happens to families and their search for child care when a center closes and what supports can be provided to these families. There was discussion about whether Early Matters Greater Austin, Austin Chamber of Commerce, and the City's Economic Development Department would be appropriate to involve in the discussion about solutions, as well as what the ECC's call to action for these groups would be.

Chair Mchorse summarized next steps as being for her and Vice Chair Worthington to collect data from the Texas Workforce Commission and Child Care Licensing and to encourage child care providers to share their stories about the affordability and cost of staying open at this time. Member Conlin agreed to have this item added this topic to the policy workgroup.

Additional update from Chair McHorse was that E3 Alliance has shared that Austin ISD saw a 10% withdrawal of students from Pre-K when the City was in Stage 5. Leander ISD saw a 18% withdrawal. Pre-K enrollment is higher than 2020, but much less than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

c. Discuss strategies and next steps regarding child care subsidy system- Anna Lisa Conlin

Member Conlin summarized the steps the ECC has taken regarding the child care subsidy system, including hearing from Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA) at 2 meetings and hearing a presentation from Nicole Robinson at Workforce Solutions Capital Area (WFS). The policy work group talked about where to go next and the Early Childhood Council's role. Chair McHorse and Members Huston and Hedrick have drafted a memo addressed to WFS. ECC members discussed training recommendations, collaboration with WFS, and tone of the memo.

First, Members Hosking and Bliss Lima would like to see cultural humility training added to the intake process and requested that trainings be added to the memo's recommendations. Member Gordon suggested adding Courageous Conversations or Beyond Diversity trainings as recommended trainings in the memo. Vice Chair Worthington suggested adding a recommendation to use the City's Equity office for training and a recommendation for a review or audit of trainings and IT at WFS and their contractor for Child Care Services. ECC members would like a list of the trauma-informed trainings and other trainings that are required of staff that work directly with families.

Second, members discussed possible collaboration. Member Conlin would like for the memo to be an invitation to collaborate and continue the conversation. Member Gordon proposed that a community review board be created in which ECC members, child care providers, and WFS would regularly review the data together. Member Hedrick suggested inviting to an ECC meeting the City and County appointed board members to the Workforce board. Member Conlin added that a person from the Research and Planning division at Travis County is appointed. Any Baby Can and AVANCE appointees are also on the WFS board. Member Huston said that ECC members could also decide to present at a WFS board meeting. Member Conlin recommended adding collaborating with WFS to explore funding and resources to the memo.

Third, Member Huston expressed concern for the tone of the memo and suggested adding to the memo more appreciation of what WFS is already doing and acknowledgement of constraints the WFS board gets from the state.

The next step is for the policy workgroup to compile the ideas presented at the meeting. Before the November meeting, members can also send comments to the policy workgroup members. ECC members will plan to vote on the memo to Workforce Solutions at the next meeting.

d. Joint Inclusion Committee updates

- i. Priority issues adopted by the JIC
- ii. ECC priority issues for JIC

No updates about the Joint Inclusion Committee

3. STAFF UPDATES

a. COVID-19 updates

Staff liaison Caitlin Oliver (Austin Public Health program coordinator) reported that the City is in Stage 3 of Austin Public Health (APH) risk-based guidelines. Number of new hospital admissions has been decreasing, as well as the 7-day moving average of cases and the positivity rate. The only child age group with a positivity rate higher than the community positivity rate is children younger than 1 year, with a rate of roughly 7.5%. The FDA advisory committee will soon meet to discuss the Moderna booster. In late-October, the committee is scheduled to discuss the COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5-11 years. The vaccine guidance from that meeting will help to inform the vaccine team at APH continue to plan for the rollout of the vaccine for 5-11 year-olds. APH will be launching a survey for parents of children aged 5-11 years to gather information about the demand for the vaccine in that age group and learn where parents would like the vaccine to be offered. Businesses, schools, child care centers, and other organizations can request vaccine education events through APH. Currently, APH is providing Pfizer booster shots to eligible populations, including teachers and child care workers.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- a. Approve 2022 meeting calendar**
- b. Census data trends**
- c. Update from Child Inc. on Head Start**

Member Conlin requested that a discussion on the child care staffing crisis in Austin be a future agenda item.

ADJOURNMENT – Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 9:48 a.m.