



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES

**REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, February 9, 2022**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, February 9, 2022.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse, Council Members Alvarez, Bliss Lima, Conlin, Demby, Gordon, Hedrick, Hosking Pulido, Huston, and Schennum

Staff in attendance: Caitlin Oliver, Donna Sundstrom, Cindy Gamez, and Michelle Rodriguez

CALL TO ORDER – Chair McHorse called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m.

CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

No citizen communication.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from January 12, 2022, meeting – Member Demby moved to approve the minutes from the January 12, 2022, regular meeting. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote of 9-0 (Member Schennum not on the dais at time of vote).

2. OLD BUSINESS

a. Update from the Community Engagement and Policy Workgroups on a response to the Workforce Solutions Capital Area letter to the ECC that was discussed at the January 12, 2022, meeting

Member Gordon said the Community Engagement Workgroup has discussed potentially offering their support to Workforce Solutions (WFS) in the development of a community engagement group, which was one of the recommendations the ECC members made to WFS in 2021 to improve customer service. Member Conlin, Chair McHorse, and Member Huston shared that the Policy Workgroup discussed responding to WFS with some follow-up requests, including: 1) a regular monthly update to the ECC concerning WFS progress on the recommendations the ECC made; 2) that the ECC have a representative on the WFS Tiger Team or that WFS consult with the ECC members on what community members to include on the Tiger Team; and 3) an opportunity to discuss interpretations of the customer service data that WFS shared with the ECC members. Member Conlin noted that the City is in the process of incorporating performance measures into contracts with WFS that incorporate customer service satisfaction. Member Hedrick posed the idea of including Baker-Ripley, the company WFS contracts with for child care services, in the conversation about customer service improvement. Member Hosking Pulido asked that the response to WFS include a request for a list of the onboarding training that child care services staff receive. Chair McHorse encouraged ECC members to review the spreadsheet that WFS provided to the ECC, which includes the customer service data for child care services. McHorse plans to send a follow up email to WFS with the additional requests discussed at today's meeting.

3. NEW BUSINESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS

a. Joint Inclusion Committee and Community Engagement Work Group updates- Raul Alvarez

i. JIC/Quality of Life (QoL) Commission Budget Town Hall on Affordability and Resiliency (February 16, 2022)

There will be a City budget town hall in the evening with a focus on affordability, including affordable child care. Members discussed approaches for inviting early childhood stakeholders and other members of the community to attend. The Success By 6 Coalition has shared the town hall information through its network. Chair McHorse asked that the members of the ECC Community Engagement Workgroup encourage parents and families to attend. Members can share the graphics about the town halls through social media and email. The members also discussed the virtual format of the meeting and how to prepare community members, especially parents and families to provide input at the town hall.

ii. Joint Inclusion Committee (JIC) Budget Timeline/Process - Budget proposals are due to the JIC by March 14th if individual boards/commissions seek JIC endorsement

The JIC has requested that individual boards and commissions share with the JIC their budget recommendations by March 14th. This will allow time for the JIC to endorse the board and commission recommendations ahead of the recommendation submission due date to the City Budget Office on March 30th. Given this timeline, the ECC only has the next regular meeting on March 9th to approve budget recommendations. Member Alvarez and Chair McHorse recommended that the ECC budget recommendation(s) specifically note which of the 10 JIC priorities apply to the recommendation(s).

b. Policy Work Group updates- Anna Lisa Conlin

i. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding update

The ECC provided recommendations to the City on how American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding could support the early childhood system in Austin-Travis County. Member Conlin, representing Travis County; Cindy Gamez, representing Austin Public Health; and Chair McHorse representing the Success By 6 Coalition, reported the progress made on executing contracts associated with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding approved by City Council. The City approved funding for 3 years, and the Travis County Commissioner's Court approved matching funds for at least 15 months. Many of the contracts have not yet been approved by City Council or the County Commissioners Court. However, this presentation does have an overview of each funding category and details on progress made in executing the contracts. Presentation slides were created by Cathy McHorse for the Success By 6 Coalition and are provided as back up material to this meeting.

Recommendation #1: Provide additional child care funding to address gaps created for families due to changes in employment status by:

- Increasing funding for Continuity of Care Program (A program that helps caregivers maintain their child care even when their pay increases.)
 - City/County plan to contract with Workforce Solutions Capital Area
 - City: \$1,965,104 -Anticipated Council action/approval on March 24
 - County: \$906,399 -In process

- Prioritizes funding for infants/toddlers on subsidy waitlist and expands program eligibility to those in job training programs and to Travis County residents (outside City of Austin)
- Funding a Family & Community Engagement Navigator & Supervisor (The original request was for this funding to be used to create a step-down child-care fund for Workforce Program Graduates to mitigate the benefits cliff, but this use was found to not be allowable under the ARPA federal funding requirements.)
 - City/County plan to contract with Workforce Solutions Capital Area
 - City: \$370,588 - Anticipated Council action/approval on March 24
 - County: \$168,233 -In process
 - Intends to provide the Child Care Subsidy Contractor with the necessary staffing support to more effectively connect families with low-income who are on the waitlist for child care services with other care options

Recommendation #2: Stabilize the child care workforce through wage supplements & tuition supports, including:

- Child Care Essential Worker Premium Pay
 - City/County plan to contract with Workforce Solutions Capital Area
 - City: \$765,945 - Anticipated Council action/approval on March 24
 - County: \$385,785 -In process
 - Expands the existing Jeannette Watson Wage Supplement program to include:
 - awards for professionals with a Child Development Associate credential (CDA);
 - annual premium pay wage stipend for two years to Jeannette Watson recipients in addition to their Jeannette Watson award; to non-credentialed essential child care professionals (including center support staff, such as cooks and cleaners) with tenure in the child care sector; and to child care workers that have been on the frontlines.
- Tuition Support through T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Texas Scholarship Program
 - City: \$157,000 -Pending Council action/approval in April 2022
 - Provides additional wrap-around supports to early childhood professionals who are pursuing higher education in the early childhood field; includes contract completion bonuses; commitment bonuses; and quality staff retention incentives for child care centers that sponsor staff to be a part of this program.
 - The County will be funding the conscious discipline training for the child care staff that participate.

Recommendation #3: Sustain & scale innovative infrastructure to increase access to affordable quality care meeting the needs of all families through:

- PreK Partnerships Hub
 - City: \$713K -Contract with United Way ATX; approved by Council in February
 - County: \$300K anticipated -Competitive procurement pending
 - As of January 2022, there are 13 partners with contracts, 10 classrooms, and 93 children co-enrolled in AISD and Head Start or a Texas Rising Star (TRS) 3 or 4 Star child care program
 - City contract includes \$112K for teacher stipends

- Additional potential investments from Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) in 2022 with state ARPA funds to support/scale this program
- Family-Based Child Care (FBCC) Networks
 - City: \$500K -Subcontract from UWATX to AVANCE, Inc. planned; approved by Council in February
 - County: \$208K anticipated -Competitive procurement pending
 - Will support creating FBCC networks, curricula, and support these child care programs to become quality rated.

Recommendation #4: Planning and implementation of solutions to address identified gaps & to strengthen the child care system through:

- A Shared Services Alliance
 - City: \$750K -Contract with United Way ATX; approved by Council in February (The Mayor Council Member Fuentes and Mayor Pro-Tem Alter Spoke in favor of this item.)
 - County: \$312K anticipated -Competitive procurement pending
 - Goal: 40 child care centers participating and having access to tech-enabled business supports (back office) and bulk purchasing
 - Additional potential investments planned by TWC in 2022 with state ARPA funds to support/scale/sustain this effort.
- Nontraditional-hour care
 - City: \$500K -Contract with United Way ATX; approved by Council in February
 - County: \$208K anticipated -Competitive procurement pending
 - United Way ATX has requested scope & bids for local analysis of demand/potential demand from 2 entities.

Recommendation #5: Stabilize programs that support families outside full time child care by:

- Increasing social services contract with the Ready Families Collaborative
 - City: \$177,083 -Pending Council action/approval in early April 2022
 - County: (included in City amount)
 - The Collaborative will provide premium pay to those home visiting and parent education providers who are providing in-person services and who have taken on additional workload due to the impacts of the pandemic. In addition, the Collaborative will use ARPA funds to add a temporary position that will focus on increasing referrals and client engagement among the Collaborative. The City has been funding this contract through Any Baby Can for many years. Made sense with ARPA to transfer this funding from the County to City to support this effort.

Recommendation #6: Expand access to full-day pre-K in:

- Del Valle ISD
 - City: \$750K -Contract executed
 - County: \$250K -Pending contract approvals; County funding can be backdated to be used for this current school year.
 - An anticipated 5-9 dual language full day PreK4 will be added to expand access for children of families that do not qualify based on state income eligibility guidelines but cannot afford tuition-based pre-K.
- Austin ISD

- City: \$902,075, pending Council action/approval in April 2022
- Scope of Work negotiations in progress
- An anticipated 5 full day Pre-K3 classrooms will be added, with an option to provide after school care as well on some of the campuses.

Recommendation #7: Expansion & evaluation of Family Connects

- City: \$325K contract with United Way ATX for evaluation
- Family Connects home visiting is a partnership with United Way ATX and Austin Public Health. It has been in place at St. David's South and is now expanding to Ascension Seton. This will fund an evaluation of the program. The funding is split between APH to pay for the new nurses that have been hired and to United Way to conduct the evaluation.

Members discussed what the ECC can do to further move the City process in implementing these recommendations. Chair McHorse shared that the ECC members could express support and thanks for these City contracts that are in development next time they talk with their Council members. She also said that once there is evidence of the impact of this additional funding and how it was used, the ECC could make recommendations to the City for either sustaining or shifting some of these funds.

ii. Discussion of fiscal year 2022-2023 budget recommendations, including brief review of ECC budget recommendations from the past two years

In 2018, the ECC made recommendations for high-quality child care and pre-K 3 investments; in 2020, the ECC made a recommendation for an additional early childhood staff person at the City; in 2021 there was a budget recommendation that the current early childhood funding be maintained, and instead, advocated for the City to make use of the federal COVID-19 relief funding. Chair McHorse explained that the 2021 recommendation to maintain current investments was made because the ECC had heard there were limited revenue streams that the City could tap into to support additional early childhood funding. Commissioners were encouraged at a recent budget workshop presented by City staff to think about where funding for recommendations might come from or how City revenue could be redistributed more equitably. Member Huston suggested maintaining current investments until the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding impacts are known and also suggested that the ECC encourage the City to consider long term funding solutions for when ARPA funding ends. Soon there will be new City Council members, so Member Huston expressed the importance of educating new members about the value of funding early child hood programs. Chair McHorse raised the idea of using a budget recommendation to make the case to the City of the need for generating a revenue stream for sustaining early childhood funding, like what San Antonio has done for Pre-K 4 SA. Austin Public Health staff, Donna Sundstrom and Cindy Gamez explained that the City has not identified continuous funding for the ARPA investments at the end of the three-year funding period. Potential continued funding would be influenced by the evidence of the impact. There has not been any discussion of ARPA impacting any existing social service agreements that the City has. City staff view ARPA as an opportunity for elected leaders to see how this increase in investment in early childhood services is supporting a very critical sector. Chair Mchorse asked that ECC members communicate with their respective council office about the ECC budget recommendations, articulate the value of early childhood investments, and answer questions council members may have about early childhood funding. The policy workgroup will formulate a draft recommendation(s) and bring it to the next regular meeting for consideration.

iii. Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Child Care Task Force survey on child care staffing

A collaborative group made up of different systems agencies have created a survey to assess child care staffing issues in the local area. The ECC members have previously discussed wanting data on how staffing shortages may be impacting program enrollment. Austin Public Health will be sending this survey to child care providers next week, so a preliminary analysis will hopefully be ready for the March 9th ECC regular meeting.

4. STAFF UPDATES

a. COVID-19 updates

Austin-Travis County is in Stage 5 of the COVID-19 risk-based guidelines. Hospitalizations and cases are on a downward trend. Local transmission level is high, with a community transmission rate of 413. Two out of every 10 tests are positive, roughly 21%. The age group with the highest positivity rate is 10-19 year olds at 28%, and the younger than 1 and 1-9 age groups have a positivity rate of 25%. It is important to continue to encourage people to get their children vaccinated and for people 12 and up to get boosted. Roughly 71% of eligible residents have received with their primary COVID vaccine dose or series, which leaves a third of the population unprotected from the virus. Austin-Travis County continues to have vaccination rates among children 5-11 that are relatively low at only about 28% of that population. Uptake on boosters is low as well. Since the last ECC meeting in January, the CDC has updated the quarantine and isolation guidance for child care programs. APH continues to work with local child care providers to provide guidance on COVID-19 protocol and recommendations.

b. Child care center at the Dove Springs Austin Public Health facility

The Early Childhood team at APH is helping to design the interior space and the playground for the child care program at the new APH facility, near the Dove Springs Recreation Center off Ainez Drive. It is an area in need of high-quality child care. Other programs from the Neighborhood Services Unit and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program will be co-located. There are going to be 6 classrooms at the center, serving 88 children- including infants through pre-K- aged children. The contract for this child care program is like the one developed for the Bergstrom Tech KinderCare. The operator will need to maintain National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation standards and an Outdoor Learning Environments (OLE!) playground. They will be required to serve a certain percentage of children receiving child care scholarships through Workforce Solutions and prioritize enrollment for City of Austin employees. In March, the City will be seeking requests for interests for child care providers looking to enter into a service agreement with the City to operate the program. Once proposals are reviewed, the City plans to select an operator in early fall 2022. An opening date is to be determined.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- a. FY 2022-23 City budget recommendations
- b. Housing and Planning Department budget presentation
- c. Update about Head Start from Child Inc
- d. Updates from organizations/programs receiving ARPA funds

- e. Texas legislative session presentation from the Intergovernmental Relations Office and IGR and Texans Care for Children
- f. Updates from APH on City Council resolutions from 2017-2021 related to including child care programs at new City facilities

ADJOURNMENT – Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 9:57 a.m.