



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING  
Wednesday, May 11, 2022**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, May 11, 2022.

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

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

**CALL TO ORDER** – Chair McHorse called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

### **PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL**

No public comment

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from April 12, 2022, meeting** – Member Hedrick moved to approve the minutes from the April 12, 2022, regular meeting. Member Conlin seconded. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote of 8-0.

### **2. PRESENTATIONS**

**a. Updates on Texas legislative actions in the 87th Legislature impacting the City of Austin**

***Presenter:***

- Brie Franco, City of Austin Intergovernmental Relations Office, Intergovernmental Relations Officer

Presentation to be rescheduled.

**b. Austin Public Health updates on City actions since 2017 Child Care and Pre-K Resolution**

***Presenters:***

- Donna Sundstrom, Austin Public Health, Assistant Director of Community Services
- Rachel Farley, Austin Public Health, Early Childhood Program Coordinator

The presenters provided updates on work completed and underway in response to a City Council resolution passed in September 2017 which directed staff to respond to twelve deliverables related to expanding existing affordable high-quality child care services and access to Pre-K.

- 2017- Austin Public Health (APH) convened a High Quality Child Care and Pre-K Resolution Work Group made up of early care and education stakeholders.
- April 2018- Staff submitted a response to Council which included a map of child care and Pre-K in Austin-Travis County, information on the availability of affordable, high-quality

early care and education, and 14 recommendations from the work group—two policy recommendations, four funding recommendations, one bond recommendation, and seven recommendations related to both policy and funding.

- April 2019- Council (Resolution No. 20190411-020) directed the City Manager to implement any policies from the High Quality Child Care and Pre-K 3 Report that could be implemented without Council action and to present a feasibility report for full Council consideration. APH communicated with various City departments and reconvened the stakeholder work group. A link to the staff response to Council is included in the presentation slide deck, which has been posted as a backup document for this meeting.

The work group proposed 2 policy recommendations:

- Policy Recommendation 1—Explore fee waivers for expenses related to opening, expanding or operating high quality child care centers; and explore increasing zoning categories where child care is a permitted use or consider waiver for the condition use permit process and/or permit fees
  - In 2018, Council passed Resolution 20181004-036 directing the City Manager to evaluate fee and zoning regulations relating to child care centers.
  - On 1/31/2019, APH amended the Fee Schedule and City Code Chapter 10-3 to waive fees for food establishment permits (\$359 annual savings) and general environment/licensing inspections (\$110 annual savings) for high quality child care centers that accept subsidies.
  - On 4/12/2019, the Planning and Zoning and Development Services Departments sent Council a memorandum with recommendations, which can be found at <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/edims/pio/document.cfm?id=317938>.
  - Discussions are ongoing with the Austin Fire Department regarding fee waivers.
- Policy Recommendation 2—Develop a policy to include the option and related price estimate for an affordable, high quality child care facility in competitive processes that the City conducts to lease or develop space for projects; and include a cost estimate and option for inclusion of an onsite quality child care center for Council to consider as part of future City projects that will house a significant number of employees.
  - In 2019, APH worked with the Housing and Planning Department (then Department of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development) to revise guidelines for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Resolution (LIHTC) program, which asks developers to assess the level of services on offer. These revisions added child care into the service referrals, partnerships, and programs offered as part of a developer's services package.
  - In 2021, Council passed resolution 20210826-108, which reaffirmed the elements of the work group's recommendations. In response, the Office of Real Estate Services (ORES) and APH have drafted a policy and scoring criteria that will be used to evaluate the advisability and feasibility of including a child care program in new development of City-owned or City-leased properties. If the evaluation of criteria determines that the inclusion of child care would be feasible and needed, ORES would then include a requested option for a high-quality child care facility in the Request for Information (RFI)/Request for Proposal (RFP) for real estate needs for that project. Implementation of this policy is set to begin in the next couple of months.

- APH is working with Housing and Planning (HPD) on including child care in the scoring matrix for the Rental Housing Development Assistance program (RHDA) application. The RHDA program provides gap financing for rental housing developments as an incentive to provide housing that is affordable for households with incomes less than 50% of the median family income for the Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area. The application is in the redesign phase and HPD plans to test a model of the new application and scoring system before the end of fiscal year 2021-22.

The work group proposed 4 funding recommendations:

- Funding Recommendation 1—Provide school districts with one-time start-up funding to set up new Pre-K 3 classrooms at \$16K per classroom.
  - In 2018, Council approved an initial \$48K investment in Pre-K classroom start-up. Beginning in 2019, Council added \$128K in Pre-K classroom start-up funds into APH’s annual general fund budget to support up to 8 new classrooms in area school districts each year.
    - In FY 2019, 8 classes were funded with general fund monies and additional classes were supported with unallocated funds (wish list funds and unspent social services agreement funds).
  - Between FY2018 and FY2022, the City has invested a total of \$608,000 to open 37 new classrooms in 5 area school districts.
    - The AISD and Leander classrooms funded with FY22 monies are set to open next school year.
    - The pandemic caused a sharp drop in Pre-K enrollment, and no school districts were able to accept funds in FY 2020 to open new classrooms.
    - Del Valle classes were Pre-K4; all others were Pre-K3.
  - Additional funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is being used by some districts to expand half day programs to full day programming.
- Funding Recommendation 2—Partner with the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children (TAEYC) to expand community-based Pre-K partnerships by investing \$41,500 annually to provide 5 scholarships each year for eligible child care and Head Start teachers to earn Texas State Teacher Certification through an Alternative Teaching Program
  - In 2019, the High Quality Child Care and Pre-K Work Group decided to withdraw this recommendation based on difficulties in recruiting teachers for a similar effort in the past.
  - The 2019 staff update to Council on the 2017 resolution recommendations included an option for Council to consider funding scholarships/education awards to incentivize qualified teachers to serve in community-based Pre-K programs and to retain qualified teachers in those programs. That specific recommendation has not been funded. However, \$713K of the City’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are allocated to United Way for Greater Austin to support their management of the Pre-K Partnerships Hub. A portion of the ARPA funds will be used to provide stipends to partnership classroom teachers as an incentive to continue working in the community-based child care setting.

- Funding Recommendation 3—Invest \$137,600 annually to accelerate 20 students per year through the Child Development Associate (CDA) Preparation Certificate program with Austin Community College (ACC)
  - This specific recommendation was not funded. However, the recommendation prompted City of Austin and Travis County staff to coordinate with ACC who administers the local Teacher and Director TRAC and staff from the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Scholarship program on ensuring all available state funds for early childhood educators to advance their education were being used before local funding. This led ACC to implement a practice of first determining if teachers were eligible for state T.E.A.C.H. funds before tapping into the locally funded TRAC program.
  - The City is investing \$157K in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support wrap-around incentives as a support for T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients working towards CDAs, Associate’s or Bachelor’s degrees. These local funds help cover some school-related expenses to the teacher and their employer that are not covered by the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship.
- Funding Recommendation 4—Invest an estimated \$75K to hire a consultant to study potential incentive programs and public private partnerships that could be effectively implemented in Austin around quality child care
  - APH staff and Cathy McHorse worked with TXP, Inc. TXP submitted the report, “[Child Care and Economic Development in Austin,](#)” detailing findings and recommendations to the City in July 2019.
  - The TXP report helped to inform Success By 6 recommendations to Council about directing ARPA funding to early childhood which resulted in Council \$11 million in child care and early childhood supports.

The workgroup proposed 1 bond recommendation:

- Bond Recommendation—Include Dove Springs Health Center in the 2018 Bond Package and expand project scope and funding to include an affordable, high-quality child care center onsite.
  - Council included this item in the bond package. The bond passed. The Dove Springs Public Health Center will include Neighborhood Center Services; Women, Infants & Children (WIC), immunizations, and a child care center. Project is in the permitting phase and will hopefully be completed in winter of 2023 or spring 2024.

The work group proposed 7 funding & policy recommendations:

- Funding & Policy Recommendation 1—Have formal discussions with AISD to use underutilized classrooms in elementary schools for high quality affordable child care for City and AISD employees and/or community members; and City investment in minor capital improvements and/or ongoing costs associated with agreements with child care providers.
  - The City, County, an AISD have a joint committee that coordinates. No action taken to date. The COVID-19 pandemic paused discussion. Some AISD facilities were used and continue to be used for COVID-19 operations.
- Funding & Policy Recommendation 2—Raise the family income level required to qualify for the Income-Eligible Child Care Assistance program available for City

- employees, and/or set the assistance level at a tiered rate to correspond with the higher cost for services per child at younger ages, and/or raise the financial assistance rate overall for all children.
- APH and the Human Resources Department (HRD) worked together to raise the income eligibility limit for the employee the Child Care Assistance Program. HRD now reviews the income limits annually.
  - APH works to promote child care benefits and information about finding child care through brochures, employee orientation, and presentations. with HRD to update a brochure for employees about the program.
  - APH worked to complete a service agreement between the City of Austin and KinderCare Education At Work to offer 10% tuition discount to employees for high-quality child care at most KinderCare location in Austin-Travis County.
  - The City of Austin added the Family Connects postpartum nurse home visit program as a health benefit for employees on January 1, 2022.
  - Funding & Policy Recommendation 3—Initiate and fund planning of a Coordinated Early Childhood Enrollment and Resources and Referral System among high quality child care providers, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, school districts, & Child Inc.
    - In 2018, APH hired Pritzker Foundation fellow to develop a coordinated early childhood enrollment system. APH convened AISD; representatives of child care subsidies, public Pre-K, and Early Head Start/Head Start); the County; and Success By 6 representatives. The team worked on identifying the commonalities in enrollment processes and elements to include in a child care search tool.
    - The work of the team was disrupted by the pandemic. Meanwhile, the state launched a website to support essential workers looking for child care. Since then, the state broadened that website into the [Texas Child Care Availability Portal](#) which includes a child care search tool for all families. The tool allows families to search for care near their home or office, for the times they need care, and to see the quality rating of programs. Locally, 211 and ConnectATX help connect families searching for care to the Child Care Availability Portal. While the portal is not a full coordinated enrollment system, it does provide a robust online search tool for families looking for early care and education.
    - Finally, through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, Workforce Solutions Capital Area (WFS) will add two Family and Community Engagement staff position positions. These staff will focus on moving children from the scholarships waitlist into care by determining what if any child care funding streams they would qualify for through WFS. They will also work with Child Inc and school districts to develop systems for providing closed-loop referrals of families to Early Head Start, Head Start, and Pre-K programs. Funding for these positions will last for 2 years.
  - Funding & Policy Recommendation 4—Cover the funding gap child care providers experience for each high quality subsidized seat between the cost for providing high quality care and the amount reimbursed for that care through scholarships.
    - This recommendation would require millions of dollars in ongoing funding. Council has not acted on this recommendation. However, since this

recommendation, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has increased child care scholarship reimbursement rates to providers, although a gap still exists between the cost of providing high quality care and child care reimbursement rates.

- Funding & Policy Recommendation 5—Pursue creation of City-owned or leased facilities for high-quality affordable child care, which should include options for contracted and City-run high quality child care services at the facility.
  - In November 2021, KinderCare at Bergstrom Tech Center opened.
  - APH is involved in planning the child care center at Dove Springs Public Health Center
- Funding & Policy Recommendation 6—Explore options for the Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) to expand existing programs and/or create new enrichment programs for children 3-5 years old that comply with quality standards.
  - In 2019 staff informed Council that PARC operates one location as a licensed child care provider at one site, but it is not feasible for PARC to expand programming for 3 reasons:
    - The pace for additional programming is limited by after-school and summer camp programming;
    - If the amount of time that PARC dedicates to enrichment programming for young children were lengthened, PARC would need to become a licensed child care provider by the state for additional sites; and
    - PARC does not have the staff capacity to expand programming.
  - PARC is doing work around the Cities Connecting Children to Nature initiative to create engaging natural play areas in parks throughout the city.
- Funding & Policy Recommendation 7—Explore options to alleviate tax burdens for quality child care centers through abatement and/or leasing City-owned property for child care centers.
  - APH worked with the Economic Development Department (EDD) to modify their scoring system that determines the level of economic development incentives to offer firms that are either relocating or expanding in Austin. In 2019, child care and family friendly practices were added to the community benefits section of the City of Austin Business Expansion Program Scoring Matrix.

The COVID-19 pandemic began as many efforts related to the 14 recommendations were being implemented or planned. Austin Public Health responded and continues to respond to support early care and education during the pandemic in the following ways:

- COVID-19 relief funding
- Other supports
  - APH provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies to over 300 child care providers at 8 distribution events and through over 1200 deliveries
  - APH stood up a nurse line that has been operating during the pandemic and has had a dedicated team of nurses staffing calls from child care programs to answer questions and provide guidance. The nurses also took COVID case

report calls from programs until January 2022 when we created an online COVID-19 case reporting system for child care programs.

- APH staff send child care programs email updates with COVID-19 guidance and resources.

The presenters thanked the original work group members and their recommendations, the Success By 6 Coalition's ongoing engagement and advocacy, and the work of the Early Childhood Council which led to City Council investing a great deal of money to strengthen the community's early childhood ecosystem. City staff has done and continues to do a great deal of work to move these efforts forward and make them sustainable.

Members made comments and asked some follow up questions regarding COVID-19 economic recovery funding and efforts to expand the availability of child care to support Austin's workforce. Donna Sundstrom and Rachel Farley noted that the pandemic has highlighted the gaps in already broken systems. The American Rescue Plan Act funding is supporting a study of the need for non-traditional hour child care, expanding child care scholarships, and including home providers in investments—all of which aim to increase access to and supply of child care. The City is also incorporating child care at City facilities and other developments. The child care provider relief grants through the CARES Act helped to shore up some of the providers that may be at risk of closing. Many quality programs received City and federal relief funding. A United Way for Greater Austin child care staffing survey results suggest that fewer quality-rated programs closed during the pandemic, compared to other programs. APH and Chair McHorse recently presented at the City Council Public Health Committee, where there was discussion about the need for a sustainable City funding system to support the child care ecosystem and workforce beyond the COVID-19 funding.

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

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

##### **i. Prioritization of early childhood education workforce and families with young children in City anti-displacement planning**

Member Conlin shared updates from the policy workgroup. Members discussed a recommendation about anti-displacement that the ECC decided to put on hold during the April meeting. The City's anti-displacement task force is no longer active. The workgroup members recommend the ECC gather more information about the City's current anti-displacement efforts. The City has hired an Anti-Displacement supervisor in Housing and Planning. Staff Liaison Oliver was asked by members to request that someone from the Project Connect anti-displacement initiative present to the ECC. More information about the City's Community Initiated Solution Funding can be found here: <https://www.austintexas.gov/communityinnovation> Application is open, and applicants must be a registered vendor.

##### **ii. Discuss adding standing agenda item inviting early childhood related groups to share updates as needed**

Members discussed adding the standing agenda item that was on the agenda prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The item included the Austin Chapter of the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children (TXAEYC), Child Care Licensing, Child Inc, E3 Alliance, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, and the Success By Six Coalition. When these names were on the agenda, it varied who attended and how often they provided comment. Member Hedrick and

Hosking Pulido sponsored this item being added to the agenda starting at the June regular meeting. Staff will inform the organizations listed on the June agenda.

**iii. Discuss access to competitive bidding process for City social service contracts**

Member Conlin shared that the policy work group discussed access to City funding for small grassroots organizations and that members want to learn more about how the City is ensuring equity in the process.

**b. Topics to bring to Joint Inclusion Committee**

Member Alvarez shared that the JIC continue to discuss board & commission budget recommendations. ECC members expressed interest in having Member Alvarez share with the JIC that equitable access to the City's competitive bidding process for social service contracts may be a potential issue for the JIC to consider.

**4. STAFF UPDATES**

**a. COVID-19 updates**

The Austin-Travis County COVID-19 community level remains at low. Cases are rising. The COVID-19 test positivity rates for Travis County are 11.1% among children under 1 year; 6.1% among children 1-9 years old; and 6.2% among 10–19-year-olds. Children ages 5-11 years have the lowest vaccination rate of any demographic eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine in Austin-Travis County, at 35.5%. APH hosted a Facebook live event on Thursday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, in English and Spanish, to promote COVID-19 vaccination for children that are currently eligible and to encourage families to get their child under age 5 vaccinated as soon as that age group becomes eligible. APH launched two online calculators for the public to use. One is to calculate whether someone is up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines and the other is to calculate whether someone is at risk for severe illness from COVID-19. This spring there have been COVID-19 clusters and outbreaks in Austin-Travis County schools that may be linked to field trips and field trip transportation. Therefore, APH has shared with child care programs and schools the importance of encouraging people to stay home and get tested if they feel sick and the importance of improving ventilation on transportation and at indoor gatherings. APH has published updated COVID-19 summer camp guidance and graduation ceremony guidance.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Potential items:

- a. Presentation on Project Connect
- b. Presentation from Early Matters Greater Austin on family-friendly designations statistics
- c. Briefing from Economic Development about the City of Austin Business Expansion Program Scoring Matrix and the economic development incentives
- d. August regular meeting plans

**ADJOURNMENT** – Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 10:01 a.m.