



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES

**REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, June 8, 2022**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, June 8, 2022.

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

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

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

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

No public comment

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from May 11, 2022, meeting – Member Huston moved to approve the minutes from the May 11, 2022, regular meeting. Member Conlin seconded. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote of 9-0.

2. PRESENTATIONS

a. Updates from Child Inc on Early Head Start and Head Start programs

Presenters:

- Beverly Davis, Child Inc, Interim Head Start Director
- Belen Hernandez, Child Inc, Dual Language Coordinator
- Edith Gray, Child Inc, Funds Development PR/Social Media Consultant

Davis provided an overview of Child Inc’s Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) programs, including highlights and areas in which the program needs additional support.

Core Programs

- City funding allows for Child Inc to provide after school care from 3-5 p.m. and summer camp programming, which the Head Start funding does not allow. Six slots are geared to expectant mothers, with priority for teenage pregnancies.

Eligibility Requirements

- Families eligible for SNAP benefits are now eligible for Head Start. They do prioritize children in foster care and experiencing homelessness.

Center Locations

- Child Inc Head Start has 12 stand-alone sites and other programs located at collaborating partner sites, including classrooms in Manor, Del Valle, and Austin ISDs.
- Every 5 years they do a community assessment to determine location of services, especially in growing areas like Del Valle and Manor.

Enrollment

- 156 children enrolled for home-based services, 176 enrolled for center-based services.
- They have the space and funding to cover the waitlist, but they do not have enough teachers to open additional classrooms.
- Child Inc is looking to convert about 300 3- and 4-year-old slots to about 100 infant and toddler program slots because of the high competition in schools for the 3- and 4-year-old slots.

Full Day Programming Supporting Working Families

- Educational curriculum is used in afterschool and summer programs. Their Head Start program utilizes The Creative Curriculum and the Scholastic curriculum, as well as the Parents as Teachers curriculum for the home visits.

Wellness Services

- The program offers wellness screenings (height, weight, vision, and hearing).
- The nutrition department at Child Inc introduces children to culturally diverse foods. Brighter Bites provides fresh produce to families. They also have an agreement with Mother's Milk. SNAP provides nutrition classes to families.
- Child Inc helps connect families and staff to mental health services. The program works with UT psychology department doctoral students who provide child and classroom observations. Child Inc has noticed a higher number of children experiencing mental health issues since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ten percent of seats must be for children with disabilities. In recent years that percentage of children with Individual Education Plans (IEP) has not been met. The program does usually meet the 10% target for Individual Family Plans (IFPS).
- Each family gets a social worker as their family advocate.

Parent, Family & Community Engagement

- Child Inc hosts many engagement activities for families, including father-child activities; KidsFest resource fair; family fun days, literacy events; and the Ready Rosie tools that include age-appropriate activities sent home for parents to do with their child.

Impact

- Child Inc EHS/HS programs focus on impacting early learning, kindergarten readiness, home visitation, families, and the community.

Teacher & Support Staff Shortages

- Child Inc is experiencing a staffing shortage. Their Head Start budget allows for 45 teachers, but they only have 43 right now (at about \$23/hour). Teaching assistants and Early Head Start make about \$18/hour. Child Inc would need additional funding to raise wages that would be competitive with wages in local school districts. Child Inc is actively recruiting on social media, getting ready to run ads on the buses, and advertising by word of mouth. Another recruiting strategy they have is to help parents attend school, and sometimes those parents are later hired to work for the program.

b. Updates from the Austin Independent School District on Head Start program

Presenter:

- Ashlee Johnson, Austin ISD, Head Start Administrator

Johnson provided an overview of Austin ISD's Head Start program, including recent highlights and areas in which the program needs additional support.

Program Overview

- Austin ISD Head Start offers 204 full day pre-K 3 slots to families in Austin-Travis County.
- A child and their family are enrolled in the program for one year.
- Each class has a certified teacher and teaching assistant.
- Head Start programs are located at 8 elementary schools. Next year one of their programs will be at Overton Elementary School due to the need identified in the area.

Services for Families

- Each family has a dedicated family advocate that does a needs assessment and goal setting.
- Families also have access to a dedicated behavior specialist and special education services.
- Parents may serve on the Policy Council after their child has left the program. This allows parents to help make the program better for the next cohort. ECC members and community members are invited to attend policy council meetings.

Partners

- The program partners with local organizations to provide services and resources to families. At the beginning of each year AISD Head Start assesses what services parents need, which helps inform partnerships for the school year.

What are they excited about?

- In 2019-20 they were considered a chronically under-enrolled program, but since then have been consistently enrolled at capacity.
- The program has new technology to engage parents and to provide recordings parent meetings and parenting curriculum classes.

What do they need support with?

- AISD Head Start needs support for after-school care. Many of the after-school providers that are already on AISD school campuses do not provide care to 3-year-olds because of the child care licensing regulations associated with providing care to young children.
- AISD is also in need of funding for full day pre-K 3 seats (outside of Head Start). The district will be expanding (converting some half day to full day seats) thanks to City and County American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Johnson said that AISD's Head Start does not receive City of Austin funds directly; however, the Early Learning Department at AISD does receive funds from the City. Children are dually enrolled in Head Start and AISD because the school is the grantee. They are not facing the same worker shortage as some other pre-K programs. Teachers get paid similarly to district Kindergarten teachers, and teaching assistants typically make around \$16/hour.

3. NEW BUSINESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS

a. Policy Work Group updates-

i. **Discuss next steps following the Austin Public Health presentation on City actions since 2017 Child Care and Pre-K Resolution**

The Policy Work Group suggested that the ECC discuss next steps and any follow-up questions members may have for City departments about the Child Care and Pre-K Resolution at the August ECC meeting. Ahead of the meeting, the work group plans to take a first pass drafting questions and next steps.

ii. **Discuss Regional Economic Equity Development Plan (REED) presentation from the Austin Diversity and Ethnic Chambers of Commerce (DECA)**

Cathy McHorse learned about the Regional Economic Equity Development Plan presentation. The housing and child care research phase of DECA's REED plan is being led by Tina Cannon. McHorse has contacted Cannon to say that the Success by Six Coalition is interested in partnering with DECA on the plan. The Policy Work Group suggested putting a presentation about the REED plan on a future agenda.

iii. **August ECC meeting**

Members Hosking Pulido and Hedrick volunteered to assist Cathy McHorse with planning the meeting on Saturday, August 13, 2022. Vice Chair Worthington suggested all ECC members share ideas for which community partners to invite to the meeting to offer resources to families at the meeting.

iv. **Standing agenda item inviting early childhood related groups to share updates**

A standing agenda item has been added to the end of the agenda. Staff Liaison Caitlin Oliver emailed contacts in each of the related groups, to inform them of the agenda item and to invite them to share updates with the ECC members. Member Huston said she would like to see this item be more proactive than a standing agenda item and that these groups be invited to present, like how AISD and Child Inc were invited to present.

v. **City Council member visits and City Council budget hearing speakers organized by the Success By 6 Coalition to discuss early childhood**

Brooke Freeland with United Way ATX and the Success by 6 Coalition has been organizing visits between ECC members and Council Members. Some meetings have already taken place, and Freeland is tracking visits in a spreadsheet that will be shared with the ECC members.

b. Topics to bring to Joint Inclusion Committee

No topics to bring to the Joint Inclusion Committee

4. STAFF UPDATES

a. COVID-19 updates

The Austin-Travis County COVID-19 Community Level remains at low. Cases are rising. In the past 7 days, there were 174 cases per 100,000 people. Once that number gets to 200 per 100K, Travis County will move to medium Community Level precautions. At the medium level, it is recommended that people wear a well-fitting mask in indoor public settings if physical distancing of 6 feet from other is not possible. People most at risk for getting very sick from COVID-19 should mask indoors. Hospitals are experiencing an increase in hospitalizations and admissions to the ICU. The risk in cases, plus more gatherings/traveling this time of year, and the identification of two new, more transmissible COVID-19 subvariants make it important to get vaccinated and boosted. Children ages 5-11 years are now eligible for a booster if it has been at least 5 months since they completed their initial vaccine series. The CDC has updated the COVID-19 operational guidance for schools and early care and education to COVID-19 Community Levels. The Austin Public Health (APH) guidance for child care programs remains the same. The FDA has scheduled meetings in June to consider the COVID-19 vaccine for children under 5. In anticipation of the approval of the vaccine in the coming weeks, APH has

created posters for child care programs to promote the vaccine. Child care programs and other businesses and organizations may sign up to host an APH mobile vaccine clinic.

5. RELATED GROUPS (As needed)

- a. **Austin Chapter of the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children**
- b. **Child Care Regulation**
- c. **Child Inc**
- d. **E3 Alliance**
- e. **Success By 6 Coalition**
- f. **Workforce Solutions Capital Area**

Nicole Robinson, Director of Child Care Contracts, and Cristela Perez-Riddel, the new Baker-Ripley Director of Child Care Services, provided updates on behalf of Workforce Solutions (WFS) Capital Area. First, WFS is contracting with Start Early based on the feedback from the Early Childhood Council to improve community engagement. WFS will be consulting and partnering with Start Early to learn more about family and provider experiences with child care services and to make recommendations toward a more comprehensive community engagement system. Second, child care relief grant applications have been approved for providers in Austin-Travis County. Funding is through emergency funding from the Texas Workforce Commission and will be paid out quarterly. 444 licensed child care centers were approved for an average award amount of \$434,870; 47 licensed homes were approved for an average award amount of \$40,378; and 54 registered homes were approved for an average award amount of \$18,524. The grant may be used by providers for things like paying wages and stipends, purchasing supplies, among other approved uses. Finally, Cristela Perez-Riddel, has returned to the Director of WFS Child Care Services position, which she previously held in 2012.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Potential items:

- a. Proclamation to acknowledge Member Anna Lisa Conlin's service on the ECC
- b. Regional Economic Equity Development Plan (REED) presentation from the Austin Diversity and Ethnic Chambers of Commerce (DECA)

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

The minutes were approved at the August 13, 2022, meeting on Member Tom Hedrick's motion, Member Aletha Huston second on a 9-0 vote.