



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL MINUTES

**REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, May 12, 2021**

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) convened on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

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

Staff in attendance: Rachel Farley, Cindy Gamez, Leila Lawson, Helen Howell, Ashlee Kraus

CALL TO ORDER – Chair McHorse called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m.

CITIZEN COMMUNICATION: GENERAL - None

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES from April 14, 2021 meeting - Member Huston moved to approve the April 14, 2021 meeting minutes and member Gordon seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by a vote of 9-0 (Members Bliss Lima and Cortes-Castillo off the dais)

2. PRESENTATIONS

a. Community Reflections on Child Care Subsidies- Laura Olson, Go! Austin / ¡Vamos! Austin, and invited parents and child care providers

Laura Olson is working with families who have had challenges accessing the child care subsidy system. She hopes by sharing their stories, with ECC support and collaboration with Workforce Solutions Capitol Area (WFS), there can be systemic solutions to their challenges. Some parents and child care providers are reluctant or scared to share their concerns. Michelle Mejia shared that it would be useful for WFS to take a trauma-informed approach instead of a compliance approach to meet families' individual needs. She said some families have experience rude treatment, miscommunication, or a lack of communication. Kassandra, a woman with an infant, spoke about having to choose between work and taking care of her son, and the challenges of being on the subsidy wait list – she was told to call back every 4 months just to stay on the wait list. Lorretta Johnson, a home-based child care provider in Dove Springs, spoke about how working with WFS has changed over the years. She noted WFS now has more interest in home-based providers and is encouraging them to accept subsidies. She says more needs to be done, such as more funding for trainings and the same reimbursement rates for home providers as for center-based providers. Jason Gindele, executive director at Mainspring Schools, said the current subsidy process is a daily challenge for families, providers, and WFS staff members. He shared the story of a mom who has struggled with the subsidy system with each of her 3 children. Mainspring helped her submit the required paperwork to apply for subsidies for her infant. She

heard back a month later that she had documentation missing. She did not receive the promised follow-up communication and did not receive responses to her calls. Her application was rejected due to missing paperwork. The challenges he has observed include inaccurate information, lost correspondence, and unreasonable timelines, which hurt children, families, and providers who suffer financially when they rely on subsidies to provide care. When issues are raised with WFS they have been addressed on a case by case basis but he says that a systemic overhaul is needed. He hopes a task force is created and that the ECC and City of Austin will collaborate with WFS to address the issues. Laura Olson recommended that conversations focus on where there is local flexibility to make changes, what changes are underway, how is feedback being incorporated into solutions, and digital access challenges faced by families who would be eligible. ECC members said that the Policy Work Group and the Community Engagement Workgroup will discuss this topic further to think about what the City could do to help. They said community members are welcome at these two work groups and suggested hearing from WFS in a work group meeting or at an upcoming ECC meeting.

3. NEW BUSINESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS

a. Early Childhood Council officer nominations and election

Member Huston motioned to approve the nominee, Cathy McHorse, as ECC Chair, and the nominee Matt Worthington, as Vice Chair. Member Gordon seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 11-0.

b. Policy Work Group updates

i. Meetings with Mayor and Council offices

Success by 6 coordinated meetings with Mayor and Council offices and have meet with all offices to date except the office of CM Kelly.

ii. American Rescue Fund recommendations

There seems to be strong support on Council for working with Travis County to collaborate on funding the Success by 6 funding recommendations. The Economic Development Department is evaluating the recommendations and will submit staff recommendations to Council by June.

iii. Endorse recommendation that American Rescue Fund monies be used to support Family Connects program

The recommendation proposes that Council allocate \$3.5 million in American Rescue Plan funding over the next three years to serve 2,000 additional families with a post-partum nurse home visit. Member Huston motioned to approve the recommendation. Member Hendrick seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 9-0 with two abstaining (Anna Lisa Conlin, Cathy McHorse).

iv. Endorse recommendation that American Rescue Fund monies be used to expand Pre-K access in Del Valle ISD

The recommendation proposes that Council allocate \$1.5 million to DVISD to provide Pre-K 4 to those who are not eligible for state funded Pre-K but are unable to afford tuition-based Pre-K. It was noted that Del Valle is a high quality child care desert. Vice Chair Worthington motioned

to approve the recommendation. Member Hosking Pulido seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 10-0 with one abstaining (Anna Lisa Conlin).

c. Winter Storm Review Task Force update- Aletha Huston

- i. Listening session dates- May 14, May 28, June 11, June 23, 6-8 p.m.

The task force holds debrief meetings on the weeks in between listening sessions. In the listening sessions, they have heard about issues of water and transportation. Nonprofits were key to helping people deal with the storm. Member Huston asked the ECC members to spread the word about the listening sessions to families with children. Community members can also submit written or video input to the task force.

- ii. **Web sites:** www.austintexas.gov/content/winter-storm-review-task-force, <https://www.facebook.com/AustinHSEM/>, <https://twitter.com/AustinHSEM/>, <http://austintexas.gov/news/winter-storm-review-task-force-take-public-comment-april-29>

d. Topics to take to Joint Inclusion Committee

The JIC reviewed budget recommendations from boards and commissions and identified three key areas of overlap across boards – technology access, language access, and mental health supports. At the next JIC meeting, CM Alvarez will share the ECC’s recommendations around American Rescue Plan funding. It was mentioned that the representatives on the JIC could be invited to share with their boards and commissions and communities that folks are welcome to provide input to ECC through the Community Work Group or through Citizen Communication. ECC members also expressed willingness to provide public comment at an upcoming JIC meeting about the American Rescue Plan recommendations.

4. STAFF UPDATES

a. COVID-19 response updates

Pfizer approved for 12-15 year-olds by FDA under EUA; CDC working on guidance for Pfizer vaccine providers for this age group; Austin Public Health does not currently have Pfizer; APH is in conversation with Travis County and UT which do have Pfizer about planning for community access to this vaccine for children; APH sent a survey to schools to get info on their students 12-15 and 16-18 to inform those conversations

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

ADJOURNMENT – Chair McHorse adjourned

The minutes were approved at the June 9, 2021, meeting on Member Aletha Huston’s motion and Member Tom Hedrick’s second, on a 9-0 vote.