



**EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 2023**

The Early Childhood Council convened in a regular meeting on Wednesday, May 10, 2023, at City Hall, Board & Commission Room #1101, 301 West Second Street in Austin, Texas.

Chair McHorse called the Early Childhood Council Meeting to order at 8:40 a.m.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse and Members Cormie, Hedrick, and Jaime

Board Members in Attendance Remotely: Members Gordon, Schennum, and Vargas

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

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL

The first five speakers to register prior to the meeting being called to order will each be allowed a three-minute allotment to address their concerns regarding items not posted on the agenda.

Justin Schneider, Community Engagement Specialist for the Austin Parks & Recreation Department (PARC) gave an update on [Resolution 20221208-059](#). PARC is working with Austin Public Health (APH) and the Intergenerational Activity & Resource Center (IRAC) Advisory Group to respond to Parts A and B of the resolution. PARC will be conducting the community engagement activities described in Part C, to gather input on initiating a pilot IRAC partnership program at the Nash Hernandez Building and at the locations recommended by PARC, including the George Morales-Dove Springs Recreation Center, Mendez Recreation Center, and Dittmar Recreation Center. Community stakeholder engagement will be conducted over the next 6 weeks. A survey is being launched today. The Advisory Group and PARC will also be presenting information to the Commission on Aging at their May 10th regular meeting.

Michelle Mejia, Early Childhood Organizer with Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA), thanked the RAPID Survey Project team for presenting at the ECC meeting today. GAVA served as a thought partner of the RAPID Survey team last year on how be inclusive of people outside of traditional child care services, such as friend, family, and neighbor (FFN) providers. She also shared that GAVA has been in conversation with Mayor Watson's staff to schedule an Early Childhood Townhall.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve the minutes of the Early Childhood Council Regular Meeting on April 11, 2023
The minutes from the meeting of 4/11/2023 were approved unanimously on Member Hedrick's motion, Member Cormie's second, on a 7-0 vote.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

2. Updates from related groups (as needed), including Austin Chapter of the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, Austin ISD, Child Care Regulation, Child Inc, E3 Alliance, Success By 6 Coalition, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, and other groups in attendance
Chair McHorse shared that the Success by 6 (SX6) Coalition is in the process of updating their strategic plan and has released a form seeking parents to serve as paid consultants to help with community engagement and inform the strategic planning process. The form is available in the most recent SX6 newsletter and on the new SX6 VeryConnect page for community partners (<https://community.unitedwayaustin.org/groups/640229a3f6bda8000763f7ca/details>). The updated strategic plan will be released in April 2024. No other related groups provided updates.
3. Presentation regarding the Austin-Travis County Ready Families Collaborative and local home visiting programs
Presenter(s):
 - Rebecca Elizondo, Senior Program Director, Any Baby Can**Rebecca Elizondo provided an overview of the Ready Families Collaborative (RFC), a collaborative within the Success By 6 Coalition, made up of 10 organizations in Austin-Travis County that provide developmental service to children aged 0-5 years and their families. Services include home visitation, two-generation service models, Play to Learn groups, parenting classes, child development services, and case management. Since 2015, Any Baby Can has been the RFC organization that holds the social service contract with the City of Austin. The partner organizations in the collaborative and their services are:**
 - Any Baby Can
 - Play to Learn & Parenting Groups
 - Home Visiting Programs
 - Austin PBS
 - Play to Learn & Parenting Groups
 - AVANCE of Austin
 - Two Generation Programs
 - Home Visiting Programs
 - Camp Fire Balcones
 - Play to Learn & Parenting Groups

- **Communities in Schools**
 - **Two Generation Programs**
 - **Home Visiting Programs**
- **Jeremiah Program**
 - **Two Generation Programs**
- **Literacy Coalition of Central Texas**
 - **Play to Learn & Parenting Groups**
- **SAFE Alliance**
 - **Play to Learn & Parenting Groups**
- **YMCA of Austin**
 - **Play to Learn & Parenting Groups**
- **United Way for Greater Austin**

Director Elizondo presented RFC data from fiscal year 2015-22. The RFC partner agencies served 8,718 children in 2015-22 (2,000 annually). Nearly 50% of these children participated in Any Baby Can programs; 20% with AVANCE; 15% with the Literacy Coalition; 7% with the YMCA. The RFC has low rates of client duplication, with only 3% being served by 2 or more RFC agencies. Most children served were from households with low income. Agencies have worked to increase reach to families with younger children aged 0-3 years, to connect them with Early Intervention services. The majority of children served were Hispanic or Latino (70%); 13% were non-Hispanic White; and 5% Black or African American. The RFC and the Success By 6 Coalition use state and local data to determine the Austin-Travis County zip codes with the most children at highest risk of not being school ready and at highest risk for abuse and/or neglect. The top 3 zip codes identified are 78744, 78741, and 78617; 15%, 11%, and 6% of RFC clients are within those zip codes, respectively.

Recent RFC successes include:

- **Developed a continuum of service model- linkage between the different programs offered by collaborative partners**
- **Referral/outreach coordination process through ConnectATX**
- **Shared data management and process improvement to reduce duplication of services**
- **Improved the quality of services through shared professional development and networking**
- **Shared resources, especially during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., diapers, formula, mental health resources, meal distribution, outreach support).**

Current challenges for the RFC include:

- **Cost of living increase for families in Austin and the RFC agencies**

- Many RFC partners have had to incorporate case management to help rise in family stressors around accessing basic needs. They need more funding to provide this increased case management.
- Recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff, especially for bilingual and licensed positions. Many RFC partners have had to increase salaries to retain quality staff.

Some ECC members asked how agencies become a part of the RFC. In 2015, when the coalition applied for the funding, they chose some smaller, grassroots organizations not funded in the past, but that were doing good work in the early childhood space. Some of the decisions about who gets funded through the RFC is based on the social service contract with the City of Austin. The RFC received some American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support hiring someone to promote the RFC to the community. Chair McHorse reminded members that one of the ECC's 2023-34 budget recommendations to City Council was to increase funding to social service contract holders by 20%, to account for cost of living increases.

4. Presentation highlighting recent key findings from RAPID's national provider survey

Presenter(s):

- Katie Nicolaou, M.A.; RAPID Survey Partnership Coordinator, Stanford Center on Early Childhood

Katie Nicolaou shared that the RAPID National Surveys started due to the COVID-19 pandemic, originally to understand its impact on access to early childhood education and support resources for families. Households with at least one child under 6-years-old were surveyed via computer or smartphone, beginning in April 2020. A child care provider survey was added in 2021. The survey is available in English and Spanish and the sample is geographically, income, and racially/ethnically representative. More than 16,000 households and over 3,200 providers have been surveyed to date. The provider survey collected provider responses from March 2021-December 2022 from providers in all 50 states. Thirty-three percent of respondents were center directors; 30% were home-based providers; 25% were center teachers; and 9% were family, friend, network (FFN) providers. The core questions focus on material hardship, child well-being, adult well-being, health care, and provider working conditions. Some key findings in these core content areas, include:

- Families report the highest difficulty with paying for food, housing, and utilities. At least 20% of families have consistently reported material hardship since the beginning of the survey, with hardship increasing dramatically to around 40% of families in April 2022.
- Families with more material hardship typically report more emotional distress than families with less material hardship.

- **Most parents reported experiencing child care disruptions that affected their work in 2022.**
- **Child care staffing shortages impact 2/3 of center-based child care programs and 1/5 of home-based programs between September 2021-November 2022. Eighty-eight percent of providers said staffing shortages led to increased stress; 66% said it caused them to be more exhausted/burnt out; 46% said they were more anxious; 41% said it was hard to decompress and engage in activities outside of work. Other impacts included things like less time to clean and sanitize classrooms.**
- **Among child care providers who currently do not own their home (n=227; July-November 2022), most said that being unable to afford a downpayment and no lack of affordable housing are the biggest barriers to homeownership.**
- **One-third of providers surveyed between September 2021-November 2022 (n=1,005) said they are considering leaving the child care field, with rates being similar between home-based and center-based providers.**

Some ECC members expressed interest in seeing what differences may exist between states with more supports for families and those with less family-friendly policies. The RAPID Survey team has not done state-by-state comparisons, but has done regional analysis. Kate Nicolaou shared some open-ended responses from Texas providers, who highlighted issues with an increased cost of living that has made it difficult for providers to cover the cost of food, utilities, and rent. RAPID is currently doing some survey research in partnership with Harris County.

STAFF BRIEFINGS

5. Updates from Caitlin Oliver, Austin Public Health, regarding the Early Childhood Social Service Contract Solicitation process and an APH training series for Austin-Travis County child care providers
Staff liaison Caitlin Oliver provided an update that the release of the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Early Childhood Issue Area Social Service Contracts has been postponed. Due to unforeseen circumstances, APH has been asked to pivot to address emergency needs in the community and as a result has been directed to postpone the Early Childhood RFP. APH expects to release this solicitation in the fall or winter. Updates will be posted on the solicitation website (<https://www.austintexas.gov/article/2023-006-early-childhood-rfp>). In the meantime, APH expects to continue funding for current agreements beyond September 30th. Caitlin Oliver also shared that APH is launching a free training series for Travis County child care directors & teachers, in partnership with Workforce Solutions Capital Area (WFS). The first 2 public health topics are Heat & Water Safety on May 24 and Communicable Disease Prevention on June 14. Providers can register on the WFS “For Providers” page (<https://www.wfscapitalarea.com/our-services/childcare/for-providers/>).

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

6. Discussion and possible action regarding the Early Childhood Council Quality-of-Life (QoL) Study Request for Proposal (RFP) and workgroup membership
No action was taken.
7. Discussion and possible action regarding the Joint Inclusion Committee (JIC) representatives and updates from the April JIC meeting
No action was taken.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

ECC members listed the following future agenda item(s):

- **Presentation on the results of the Nontraditional-Hour Child Care in Austin/Travis County Study**
- **Presentation about the Workforce Solutions Capital Area Start Early Report**
- **Presentation on early childhood legislation from the 88th Texas Legislative Session**
- **Presentation from AVANCE of Austin and their partnership with the Ready Families Collaborative**

Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 10:01 a.m. without objection.

The minutes were approved at the August 12, 2023, meeting on Member Tom Hedrick's motion and Member Eliza Gordon's second, on a 9-0 vote.