



**EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023**

The Early Childhood Council convened in a regular meeting on Wednesday, October 11, 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 8:32 a.m.

Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse and Members Hamilton, Hedrick, and McCollum

Board Members in Attendance Remotely: Members Cormie, Jaime, Schennum, and Selig

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

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.

There was no public comment.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approve the minutes of the Early Childhood Council Regular Meeting on September 13, 2023
The minutes from the meeting of 9/13/2023 were approved unanimously on Member Hedrick's motion, Member McCollum's second, on a 7-0 vote. Member Jaime was absent at the time of the vote.

STAFF BRIEFINGS

2. Updates from Rachel Farley, Austin Public Health (APH), regarding child care at the Civitan Neighborhood Park, response to City Council about the Intergenerational Resource and Activity

Center (IRAC) resolution, the solicitation for early childhood social services, Land Development Code amendments regarding child care, and child care at the Dove Springs Public Health Facility **Rachel Farley, APH Early Childhood Program Supervisor, shared the following with ECC members:**

- **APH held a community engagement meeting regarding the Chapter 26 application for City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department to transfer land to APH. This would allow the Mariposa Family Learning Center to continue to operate and expand on park land. Next step is for APH to present at the Parks & Recreation Board meeting on November 27.**
- **The APH response to the City Council IRAC resolution was submitted the week of the ECC meeting. Some barriers that have arisen in recent meetings about the feasibility of an IRAC program at the Nash Hernandez building is lack of space for both adult day health services and child care and some potential legal barriers around the City providing physical health care services as part of an adult day health program.**
- **The Request for Proposals for a child care program operator at the new Dove Springs Public Health Facility will be released late October. The goal is to have an operator identified by the time construction is complete, in late summer 2024.**
- **The land development code recommendations that relate to child care are set to be voted on at the October 19 City Council meeting. The overall goal of the recommendation is to make child care, both center- and home-based, allowable in more spaces and in less spaces that would require conditional use permits. A few weeks later, Council will vote on child care related parking.**

DISCUSSION ITEMS

3. 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 **Member Corie Cormie provided updates on behalf of Travis County. The Travis County Early Childhood RFP will be released in early February 2024. She invited the ECC to share community data, the Success By 6 (SX6) strategic plan, and recommendations with Hilda Rivas at Travis County.**

Chair Cathy McHorse shared SX6 Coalition updates. The next SX6 stakeholder meeting was on October 23. SX6 workgroups continue to focus on the next strategic plan. They have also written a letter of support for the Civitan Neighborhood Park Chapter 26 application. McHorse also reminded the group that the Early Childhood Town Hall with Mayor Watson, hosted by Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA), will be November 1, 6 p.m., at Austin Community College Eastview. Finally, she updated the members that there is a website for people to learn more about proposition 2, the child care property tax exemption

proposition, on the statewide ballot this November, called Texansforprop2.org. Open Door Preschools hosted a press conference about proposition 2 in October.

4. Presentation by David Feigen, Director of Early Learning Policy at Texans Care for Children, regarding the potential impact of the 88th Texas Legislative Session on the early childhood sector **David Feigen presented information about early childhood education gains and stalls this Texas legislative session.**

Opportunities and challenges

- **Controversial topics, like gender-affirming care and abortion, meant less time to consider other issues like ECE**
- **Competition for the budget surplus that everyone wanted a piece of**
- **Institutional knowledge lost with legislator turnover**

Early Education

- **It did not pass, but, this legislative session, \$2.29 billion bedrock funding was introduced to continue American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grants, to provide programs money to get teacher wages to \$15/hour, among others.**
- **Bills related to supporting pre-K partnerships, the child care property tax exemption proposition, and streamlining child care director training did pass.**

Early Intervention

- **Early intervention services got a big increase from the TX legislature. Feigen believes this was largely due to an incredibly persuasive family that spoke with legislators about how these interventions impacted their family.**

Health Coverage

- **The legislature switched priority to 12-month Medicaid coverage postpartum, rather than 6 months, and it passed.**

Next steps:

- **Bill implementation of those that passed this session or pervious session**
- **A 3rd special session is underway. There are ECE opportunities, but they are not a priority.**
- **Proposition 2 for property tax exemption for child care is on the statewide ballot.**
- **Developing research and advocacy strategies (identifying family advocates, etc.)**
- **Building renewed policy agenda for the 89th session**

Members discussed with Feigen ways to garner more support for the issues that did not pass this session and what has the potential to pass in future sessions. For example, the bedrock funding was the first time that proposal for early education had been introduced, and it can be difficult to get a new investment in a single session, especially for an issue that the legislature has historically not seen as a priority, like ECE, or that has such a big price tag. Finding champions is important. For the next session, finding parents to speak to

issues with the child care scholarship waitlist may be a priority. Finally, there was a discussion about how much to link child care issues to business versus brain development.

5. Presentation by Nicole Robinson, Director of Child Care Contracts at Workforce Solutions Capital Area, regarding the Start Early report and next steps

Nicole Robinson provided information on what Workforce Solutions (WFS) Capital Area Child Care Services has already done or is currently working on based on their family engagement survey, and what their next action steps are. For the Start Early report, several interviews were convened in English and Spanish, including two family and two child care provider individual interviews. They also interviewed local organizations and the current WFS contractor, Baker Ripley. Based on the feedback, WFS is putting into place ongoing feedback loops to address needs. WFS has already done or is continuing to improve the following:

- **Established clearing processes for cases and waitlist process, including a feature that shows families the status of outreach (e.g., whether enrollment is open or closed and a waitlist time estimate)**
- **Offers a translation line for families**
- **Added a new family support/navigator team that includes one lead and three navigators**
- **Added child care and behavioral inclusion specialist**
- **Added more bilingual staff**
- **Introduced Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) after participating in the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) statewide "train the trainer" for ASQ**
- **Introduced a customer service survey**
- **Have done a pilot texting service**

The next steps for WFS include:

- **Adding a position on board of directors that is specifically for child care. They are looking for a child care owner or director to fill that seat by early November.**
- **Creating a local child care committee by January 2024, comprised of licensed centers and homes, current or former child care scholarships (CCS) families, board staff like Nicole Robinson, and other community stakeholders. The goal of the committee will be to connect with families and get their input on various initiatives (e.g., how to invest quality initiative funds).**
- **Contracting with a consultant throughout this new fiscal year who will further explore the Start Early report and explore other ways to meet the needs expressed.**

6. Updates from the Joint Inclusion Committee (JIC) staff liaison Alejandra Mireles, Equity Office, about the JIC Budget Townhalls and updates from the JIC representatives regarding

recommendations brought forth by the Human Rights Commission at the last JIC regular meeting that promote the well-being of youth and their families

Alejandra Mireles, staff liaison to the JIC, provided updates. The JIC budget town halls are October 18, October 24, and November 4. For more information, visit:

https://cityofaustin.formstack.com/forms/investing_in_community_fy2025. Mireles encouraged ECC members to share the information about the town halls with friends so that City Council can hear from the community. She also shared that JIC members approved five recommendations at the last regular meeting. The recommendations were related to concerns with efforts at the local and state levels to address homelessness, crime, prison conditions, and immigration.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

7. Approve 2024 Early Childhood Council regular meeting calendar
Members discussed moving the regular meeting time to 9 a.m. or to lunch time, to better accommodate members' schedules. The staff liaison will check with the Office of the City Clerk about alternative meeting times before the next regular meeting on November 8, 2023. Members also agreed to change the March 2024 meeting date on the draft calendar to March 20, to avoid conflicts with spring break and SXSW. Member Hedrick moved to approve the 2024 regular meeting dates as amended. Member Cormie seconded, and the meeting calendar was approved unanimously on a 7-0 vote. Member Selig was absent at the time of the vote.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

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

- **Presentations from people and groups supporting local family-based child care**
- **Update about the local child care cost modeling project**
- **Potential action regarding the City of Austin Chapter 26 application related to child care at Civitan Neighborhood Park**
- **Discussion and endorsement of the new Success By 6 Coalition Strategic Plan**
- **Updates on Texas legislative efforts, throughout the year, as needed**

Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 9:59 a.m., without objection.

The minutes were approved at the November 8, 2023, meeting on Member Tom Hedrick's motion and Member Corie Cormie's second, on a 9-0 vote.