

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TASK FORCE**

## **Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2022 Interim**

**August 24, 2022**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The 3rd meeting of the Early Childhood Education Task Force was held on Wednesday, August 24, 2022, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Danny Carroll, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Danny Carroll, Co-Chair; Representative Samara Heavrin, Co-Chair; Senators Wil Schroder, Reginald Thomas, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Adam Bowling, Josie Raymond, and Scott Sharp.

Guests: Jennifer Washburn, Executive Director, iKids Childhood Enrichment Center; Amy Smith, Principal/Preschool Coordinator, Memorial Education Center – Pulaski County Schools; Tom Haggard, Director, Kentucky Out-of-School Alliance; Sandra Woodall, Executive Director/Founder, Early Childhood Learning Education Assessment Resource Network; Cori Gadansky, Executive Director, Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C); Jody V. Rogers, President, KY Prescribed Pediatric Extender Care, Inc. – The Kidz Club; Michelle Rushing, Director, Mt. Zion Church Preschool West Paducah; Rachel Wurth, Director, First Christian Church Paducah.

LRC Staff: Ben Payne, Eric Rodenberg, and Maurya Allen.

Co-Chair Carroll welcomed those who had traveled and advised that as an extraordinary session was underway to address the impact of historic flooding in Eastern Kentucky.

### **Approval of Minutes – July 26, 2022**

Senator Schroder made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2022, meeting. The motion was seconded by Representative Bowling and approved by voice vote.

### **Discussion of Types of Child Care Offered in the Commonwealth**

Jennifer Washburn, Executive Director, iKids Childhood Enrichment Center began the presentation by discussing her facility established in Benton, Kentucky over 20 years ago. The iKids facility is rated 5 Stars in the Kentucky All STARS program and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

While the facility is licensed for 97 children, they are not at full capacity due to staffing concerns and a desire to maintain a lower student/teacher ratio. The center serves as a co-op placement for local high school seniors seeking child development/child care credentials and has employees participating in apprenticeship programs and practicum placements with local postsecondary education providers. Even as a high-quality provider, iKids teachers only make \$13 an hour, an increase from pre-pandemic rates thanks to ARPA funding expansions. However, when ARPA funds expire, the pay for employees will drop back to approximately \$10 per hour and that will force employees to leave. If the center chooses to maintain higher pay, those costs will be passed on to families which will be forced some families to go to low-quality/lower cost child care providers. Ms. Washburn said 55 percent of surveyed child care providers report that the loss of ARPA funds will impact them. As many as 40 percent will raise tuition and up to 20 percent may be forced to close. The legislature should invest in the implementation of House Bill 499 from the 2022 Regular Session, expanding CCAP reimbursement rates, and supporting competitive wages, benefits, and educational opportunities for early childhood staff.

Amy Smith, Principal/Preschool Coordinator, Memorial Education Center, Pulaski County Schools spoke to the value of public preschool and how it relates to public schools. The Memorial Education Center is an early childhood center serving children age 6 weeks through preschool as well as some kindergarten aged children. Each classroom has a structured curriculum and staff participate in mandated state training. Unfortunately, preschool is only a half-day program, and this does not meet the needs of working families. Currently, 63 percent of enrolled preschool students also attend the ‘wrap-around’ before school/afterschool program offered at Memorial Education Center. During that time, the students receive continued curriculum and other services from certified teachers and child care staff. Preschool staff are employees of the school district and receive the same benefits as classified school teachers and staff. Funding for the center is provided from the state budget, but additional funds are needed to cover the costs of all-day care. The center has received funding through grants, CCAP, and tuition. Public preschool prepares students for kindergarten through the development of language skills, social skills, and improved attention span. Speech, occupational, and other therapists are also available as they are on site to serve the larger school body. Data shows that 63 percent of students participating in the wrap-around program were ready for kindergarten compared to 50 percent of peers in the state and 45 percent of peers in the district. Ms. Smith asked for continued support of public preschool which does not have a waiting list and is required to take all students who qualify. Districts have been forced to find the funding for materials, staff, and facilities as the number of students who qualify for preschool has increased every year, as have the costs for materials and staff. More resources would also allow for better collaboration between early childhood education providers and schools, increased parental engagement, and improvements to the local workforce.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Carroll, Ms. Smith said to participate in publicly funded preschool, 3-year-olds must be identified as having a disability. 4-year-

olds can qualify if they have a disability or if they are below an income threshold, although if there are available slots, those above the income threshold may be admitted if they pay tuition. Because of the high demand, there are not always slots available even for those willing to pay tuition.

Tom Haggard, Director, KY Out of School Alliance (KYOSA), spoke to the importance of summer enrichments and comprehensive after-school programs for young people. Out-of-school programs allow students to expand their education and provide peace of mind for parents who need child care for older children during the summer or after the traditional school day. Data shows that participation in out-of-school programs reduces children's participation in risky behaviors by providing a safe and supervised environment. Often, these programs reinforce what students learn in the classroom or help address areas where students need remedial attention. KYOSA has identified over 1,300 out-of-school programs, but Mr. Haggard discussed how these are not distributed equitably across the state. He also informed the members that for every dollar of investment in out-of-school programs, the community realizes a benefit of \$3 to \$4 of reduced spending in policing and corrections as well as increased productivity from working parents. Out-of-school programs are also helping address the education loss caused by school closures during the pandemic. As many as 37 percent of families say there is not an afterschool program available in their area, and 46 percent do not have reliable transportation to or from an out-of-school program even if it is available. Mr. Haggard said out-of-school programs are a resource waiting to be tapped, because these programs can accelerate student learning and learning recovery. Rightfully, much attention is paid to early childcare, but he insisted that some attention also needs to be directed to school aged children because every student in Kentucky should have access to quality afterschool and summer school programs.

In response to a question from Senator Thomas, Ms. Smith said children can only participate in public preschool if they qualify according to the guidelines outlined previously. To qualify with a disability, children must be screened, evaluated by a trained professional, and receive a qualifying educational disability diagnosis. There are occasionally slots available to tuition paying families in the wrap-around portion of the program because those services are funded separately from the public preschool.

In response to a question from Co-Chair Carroll, Ms. Smith explained that while some centers have closed due to the pandemic, others have been opening. This is due in part to the expansion of eligibility for CCAP which encouraged some families to go to centers that provide all-day care rather than half-day public preschools. Additionally, the public preschools do not receive SEEK funding for the afternoon wrap-around services they provide. For those services, they follow the same funding and regulation structures as other child care centers.

Responding to questions from Representative Raymond, Ms. Washburn said the Kentucky All STARS program rates child care providers and her center has sought

additional accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). To receive NAEYC accreditation, all teachers in the center must have an early childhood education credential and the center's facilities, programing, and materials are rated by an outside entity. At iKids they strive to be child driven and developmentally appropriate. Additionally, interactions between staff and students and between the parents and the center are measured and evaluated for engagement and how it enhances early childhood education. All children are also assessed in an ongoing fashion to help them achieve developmental milestones. iKids participates with community programs for wrap-around services and coordinates with their local Head Start program to provide full-day care for working families. Ms. Smith said full-day public preschool would be ideal, improving outcomes for all students, but especially for the increasing number of students with disabilities who would benefit from the increased attention and assistance provided by trained teachers.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Heavrin, Ms. Washburn said the impact of universal preschool would be dramatic. Currently, the five preschool classrooms at her school provide the funding source for the two toddler classrooms. Even with higher tuition rates for toddlers, the cost of caring for toddlers is much higher and if the preschool funding disappeared it would be impossible to have the toddler rooms open. Additionally, the infrastructure does not exist for the public schools to care for all 3- and 4-year-olds, there simply is not enough classroom space. The best proposals will look at a mixed delivery model to increase support for the school system, incentivize participation of private centers in the All STARS program, and improve quality across the board.

In response to a question from Co-Chair Carroll, Dr. Sarah Vanover, Policy and Research Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates provided a brief overview of a mixed delivery model.

Sandra Woodall, Executive Director, Early Childhood Learning Education Assessment Resource Network (EC Learn), and Francis Allison, a licensed in-home childcare provider, spoke to their experience as local, in-home childcare professionals providing an alternative to public programs and center-based child care. EC Learn is one of five partners in the Family Child Care Network which recruits, supports, and trains in-home child care providers. The Family Child Care Network is a national model as the only state funded network for in-home childcare providers and consists of eight regions with five local resource agencies. There are different levels of certification for in-home providers including Registered Home Child Care, which provides in-home care for up to three children receiving CCAP or up to eight children if they are siblings or related to the provider, Certified Home Child Care, which allows up to six unrelated children, and a Type II Home Child Care provider who can care for as many as 12 children if they meet the director qualifications for a Type II child care center. All levels of in-home providers can serve mixed age groups and provide sibling care. In-home providers have lower child-to-adult ratios, have a home environment, and frequently provide non-traditional hours.

Typically, in-home providers form lifelong relationships with the children in their care and contribute to a sense of community for families. Ms. Allison said that she is licensed for up to 12 children, but in order to stay in compliance with ratio regulations, she currently only has ten children in her care. She does have a 5 Star rating with Kentucky's All STARS program and participates in CCAP. Half of the families currently enrolled with her receive CCAP assistance. She said she chose this profession because she loves working with children, seeing them grow, and helping them be ready for kindergarten. Ms. Woodall spoke to how zoning regulations are a significant problem for many in-home providers and those wishing to becoming providers. In some cities the fee to change zoning in a neighborhood to allow for in-home childcare is small, approximately \$25, and in others it can be as much as \$500. Also, some cities allow for the fee to simply be paid while others require a home visit by an inspector. She also advocated for investment in implementing HB 499 and stabilizing funding for the CCAP.

Cori Gadansky, Executive Director, Community Coordinated Child Care (4-C), spoke to how the organization serves as a local child care resource in Louisville, is a part of the Family Child Care Network, and has more than 50 years of experience. The 4-C organization seeks to ensure that childcare is high quality and there is support for the highly fragmented network of childcare throughout Louisville. 4-C is also a partner with Greater Louisville Head Start and serves as a source of professional development for child care providers and staff. They are funded through a blended funding model and infuse additional funding into programs targeting low-income families and providing high-quality child care access to those populations. They are also a resource for child care directors for letters, training materials, sample documents, resources on food service, and nutrition. Ms. Gadansky said 4-C also facilitates getting staff credentialed with the Child Development Associate (CDA), the first level credential for staff, and connects job seekers with quality child care programs. 4-C provides referrals to families so they can find providers that meet their needs and advocates for families with young children and for child care providers. They meet regularly with other advocacy groups and recently performed a survey of providers regarding CCAP. The preliminary results showed that 57 percent of providers are not fully staffed, with over 70 percent of those needing to hire between one and five staff. Additionally, up to 55 percent reported they would have closed if not for stabilization payments and CCAP increases. This data was used to demonstrate how tense the situation is, the need to sustain investment in CCAP reimbursement, eligibility, and transition periods, and the critical need to support competitive wages and educational opportunities for child care staff.

Jody Rogers, President, The Kidz Club, spoke to the role played by prescribed Pediatric Extended Care (PPEC) providers for medically fragile children. Often these children need multiple subspecialists and cannot easily attend traditional child care facilities. Children with medical complexities, while a very small subset of children, account for nearly 30 percent of all childcare medical costs. These children deserve a quality medical and educational support system. Kentucky is one of only 12 states with

PPEC in its state licensure statutes and as a result there are ten PPEC providers spread throughout the state. All PPEC providers have early education teachers as well as medical support services. During this small window of time, staff at PPECs can help get these children on the path to long-term success. They also help reduce feelings of isolation for families, prevent emergency room and hospital visits, and help provide stability for children and families. PPECs are an upstream solution and can be expanded to help more children. In recent years, PPEC funding has been stabilized, however, reimbursement can be difficult through Medicaid. PPECs do provide a cost savings by preventing hospitalization, but there is a need to increase awareness and include this style of care in case management discussions for children with medical complexities.

In response to a question from Co-Chair Carroll regarding zoning barriers, Ms. Woodall said having a common framework for the entire state is helpful, but in Northern Kentucky alone there are so many cities with so many different ordinances and fee structures that it quickly becomes a barrier. Ms. Gadansky said that in Louisville, the primary barrier is faced by certified childcare providers trying to become Type II providers. Recent changes to Louisville ordinances were made based on statutory language and have facilitated transition, and provided a financial benefit for entrepreneurs. However, Ms. Woodall explained there is also a wide range of reimbursements to in-home childcare providers based on their location and participation in CCAP, the food service program, and other partnerships. Ms. Gadansky stressed that no one will become rich providing in-home childcare, but the peace of mind provided for new parents who want to stay home with their own children and supplement lost wages from leaving the workforce is helpful. The Family Network aids new in-home childcare providers in terms of how to establish the business and keep within a budget. Ms. Allison said becoming an in-home childcare provider is more than simply being a babysitter, it is starting a business and becoming a teacher. She made the transition from homeschooling her own child to helping raise other children in her neighborhood and she provides quality care. Part of her job involves helping children build routines and set boundaries just like a parent would. Children stay with her for years and are usually more than ready for kindergarten. She also values the bonds she forms with parents and children. She greatly appreciated the legislature including in-home childcare providers in these discussions.

In response to a question from Representative Raymond, Ms. Gadansky said becoming an in-home childcare provider is an excellent entrepreneurial opportunity for Spanish speaking and other minority populations who may have a cultural preference for childcare provided by a family member, as it contributes to the finances of the family while also preserving their cultural values. More in-home childcare providers increase access and give families more choice. The average salary of \$27,000 for an in-home provider is not sustainable as a sole family income, and some providers also receive public assistance themselves. Co-Chair Carroll said the task force will look more into the numbers of childcare providers and staff receiving public assistance at a future meeting. Regarding the potential increase in medically fragile children needing care in a PPEC facility, Mr. Rogers

said PPECs do provide peace of mind to parents who can return to work if their child can be evaluated and find placement in a facility.

Rachel Wurth, Director, First Christian Church Preschool, Paducah, and Michelle Rushing, Director, Mt. Zion Church Preschool, West Paducah, testified to their experiences operating church affiliated child care programs. Ms. Wurth said her center is lucky to be within the church space, although they operate only ten months of the year and follow the school calendar, due partly to staff having children in the school system. The Paducah First Christian Church congregation has 100 active members, although a majority of the 73 enrolled students and 13 teachers are not church members. Ms. Rushing said the Mt. Zion Baptist Church preschool operates year-round and only closes for major holidays. They have approximately 126 enrolled students and approximately 20 staff. The Mt. Zion Baptist Church preschool summer program expanded this summer and was instrumental in allowing the center to hire more staff and enroll more children. Currently, her center is 3 Star rated, but is seeking 5 Star rating, dependent largely on the need to hire more staff and reduce student/teacher ratios.

Ms. Wurth said her center does not currently have any CCAP enrolled children, all parents pay tuition and the wait list is long. Her center is recognized in the community as an actively engaged preschool option where parents expect to find high quality care. Her facility is largely staffed by individuals with advanced degrees, and they should receive wages to reflect that level of training. It is not uncommon for her to lose excellent staff because the wages are too low and there are no additional benefits such as health insurance or retirement funds. The First Christian Church Preschool has not raised tuition for five years, but when ARPA expires, that will force a tuition hike to maintain staff wages at their current rate. Ms. Wurth also said that many children enter the preschool at 18 months old and families will stay in the center until they go to kindergarten. This reduces the number of available openings. Ms. Rushing said her center has partnered with the public school system and hopes to get grant funding into the next school year. Both directors testified that families desire quality child care but there is over a year-long wait list for infant and toddler slots. Most families, both in the centers and on wait lists, do not qualify for the public school system preschool. Ms. Wurth said her classroom facilities have been increased and remodeled over time, but the space is limited because of licensure requirements and the existing structure of the church building. Additionally, she cannot provide a food program, as the church kitchens do not meet licensing requirements, so families must send their own lunches for children. Ms. Wurth said her facility does participate in the federal food program, but again, the church was built before the preschool was established and there is no additional room for expansion.

In response to a question from Co-Chair Carroll regarding wait lists, all providers agreed the wait lists are exceptionally long with many pregnant mothers calling to reserve a spot well before their children are even born.

With no further business to come before the task force, the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.