

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TASK FORCE**

## **Minutes of the 4th Meeting of the 2022 Interim**

**September 22, 2022**

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

The 4th meeting of the Early Childhood Education Task Force was held on Thursday, September 22, 2022, at 3:00 PM, in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Samara Heavrin, 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: Mary Kay Connolly, Director, Read Ready Covington; Laura Lewter, Executive Director, YMCA of Greater Louisville; Phillip Smith, DCBS/DCC; John Mountjoy, Executive Director, Kentucky Headstart.

LRC Staff: Ben Payne, Logan Bush, and Maurya Allen.

### **Approval of Minutes - August 24, 2022**

Senator Wilson made a motion, seconded by Representative Bowling, to approve the minutes of the August 24, 2022 meeting. The motion passed by voice vote.

Co-Chair Heavrin made opening remarks reminding those present that the task force would not be voting on any legislation, and what the goals of the task force are. She asked for all parties to remain civil in their communications regarding the topics discussed.

### **Improving Early Care & Education Access and Quality Through Public-Private Partnership**

Present to speak regarding public-private partnerships to improve access to early care were Benjamin Gies, Director of Early Childhood Policy & Practice, Prichard Committee; Janet Bock-Hager, West Virginia Pre-K Coordinator and West Virginia Pre-K Steering Team Representative, West Virginia Department of Education; Dr. Whitney Stevenson, Director of Early Childhood, Fayette County Public Schools; and Dr. Sarah Vanover, Policy and Research Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates.

The panel spoke to how mixed-delivery preschool models function and how they harness public-private partnerships to improve access to quality childcare. Mixed-delivery preschools are public preschool classrooms housed within private child care centers. This increases the wrap-around services available to children in public preschool and expands the hours of delivery for working families. Funding for these models combines public funding, such as federal funds and CCAP, with private pay tuition. They cautioned against simple expansion of the public preschool without mixed-delivery, because it can crash the private child care market. Centers can only financially cover the costs of care for very young children, ages infant through age 3, because of the tuition provided by older children, ages 3-4 attending their centers. Without that funding source, quality and access will decline. Several other states, such as West Virginia, have addressed this concern with a mixed-delivery model, and the panel gave a brief overview of the West Virginia preschool system.

Dr. Stevenson presented the mixed-delivery public-private partnership that is used in the Fayette County Public Schools, which has been in existence for several years. Mr. Gies gave an overview of the Greater Owensboro Partnership for Early Development which is also an example of a new public-private partnership for mixed-delivery preschool in Owensboro and Daviess County bringing all stakeholders together to improve access to quality child care. Dr. Vanover spoke more directly to the funding structure used in mixed-delivery models that ensures high quality childcare, especially for those children who qualify for Headstart or public preschool due to disability. When in a blended classroom, the private classroom must meet the minimum standard of a public preschool in terms of staff training, curriculum, and safety which frequently improves quality.

In response to questions from Senator Thomas, Dr. Stevenson said there is a place for universal preschool, if it remains optional for families and not mandatory. However, creating a universal preschool option will require the input of government agencies, private facilities, public schools, and families, to ensure the best level of funding, quality, and access. Dr. Vanover said the current model in Fayette County is limited to children who qualify for public preschool or Headstart, but it does not need to be limited to only those children. If a dollar amount is assigned for the cost of child care for one child, similar to how funding is established using the SEEK formula for public school, that money can follow the child into whichever kind of child care is appropriate for the family, be that public or private. This would create more access and stabilize funding for private child care providers, who would still be required to meet minimum state standards if they are receiving any public funding to provide universal preschool.

Responding to questions from Co-Chair Carroll, Dr. Stevenson said that the current model for a public preschool classroom in a private facility does ensure that the teachers in those classrooms meet the minimum level of training necessary for public preschool teachers and have the opportunity to participate in many of the same benefits that public school teachers do. Dr. Vanover explained that for students who only qualify for half-day

funding, and attend a public program housed in a private facility, the facility gets the funding for the half-day public preschool, and can apply for CCAP or charge tuition for the second half of the day, because they are still a licensed childcare facility. This financially supports the center and ensures full-day care for the child, which can be the best option for working families. There are multiple models for a mixed-delivery system, and each community can design a system that works best for them based on local needs.

In response to a question from Representative Raymond, Dr. Vanover said it is beyond her expertise to say whether preschool children should be included in the SEEK formula. She said they were using the SEEK formula as an example of how a dollar amount can be determined and assigned to children for publicly funding K-12 education, and a similar formula could be established for a universal mixed-delivery early childhood education program. Mandy Simpson, Chief Policy Officer, Metro United Way, came to the table to say that including preschool children in the SEEK formula would absolutely require an add-on amount because of the high cost of care for three and four-year-olds, and an average-daily-attendance model (as used in SEEK) would not be as appropriate for preschool children. SEEK funds are given to schools to administer and that would need to be monitored to ensure the preschool dollars were appropriately distributed.

Responding to further questions from Representative Raymond, Dr. Stevenson said that in the beginning of the mixed-delivery model at Fayette County, the preschool teachers were certified but did not receive the same pay which became an equity issue. Fayette County now pays certified public preschool teachers as they do any other classroom teacher to address concerns and attract the most qualified staff. Dr. Vanover said there are clear differences in pay between private childcare staff, Headstart teachers, and public-school preschool teachers, based primarily on the funding received by their employer and their level of education. Wage stabilization across the board for child care staff would help address this equity issue.

### **Child Care Opportunities & Challenges in Rural Communities**

Present to speak regarding the challenges faced by early care providers, and the challenges for families in rural Kentucky to find quality child care providers, were Debbie Link, Executive Director, Child Care Council of Kentucky; and Becky Stacy, Executive Director, Appalachian Early Childhood Network.

Ms. Link spoke to the mission of the Child Care Council of Kentucky and their participation with the Family Childcare Network of Kentucky, who was represented at the August meeting of the task force. She briefly reminded the task force members about the different levels of certification for in-home child care providers and the reasons why families benefit from having certified and Type II in-home child care providers. There is a lack of quality child care in rural Eastern Kentucky and in-home child care providers can help address needs in that region. She reiterated how fragile the child care industry was even before the pandemic, and the need to invest in higher wages for child care providers.

She asked for the legislature's support for funding stabilization and a cost study to evaluate the CCAP reimbursement rate, as well as increased funding for start-up grants for in-home child care providers.

Ms. Stacy said the Appalachian Early Childhood Network works to increase access to child care. In the 46 counties that comprise the network, there are 42 family child-care homes. This does not include the number of child care centers or Headstart, but in some of the counties there are no options for child care at all, especially for the very young children aged infant to age 3. She shared testimonials from parents and in-home child care providers to illustrate the value of in-home child care to families looking for choice and the value of becoming business owners for providers. The Network works to ensure that all the in-home providers are properly trained and have developmentally appropriate materials for the children in their care.

Co-Chair Carroll thanked the presenters and asked if there were any other legislative barriers that could be addressed, such as zoning regulations, to assist the development of in-home child care. Ms. Stacy said that zoning had not been an issue in her region. Ms. Link said that zoning fees were not a barrier in the urban area of Lexington, but in some of the more rural areas it had posed a challenge.

Responding to a question from Representative Raymond, Ms. Stacy said the start-up costs varied widely, and the Appalachian Early Childhood Network had been able to provide some start-up grants of \$2,500. While these are valuable, they do not come close to the costs of starting an in-home child care business. Additionally, the individuals who are starting an in-home child care frequently do not view themselves as business owners and they need training on how to properly manage costs. Ms. Link said one of the cost issues is that providers purchase items such as outdoor play equipment or educational materials that they can afford, but those materials do not last, causing them to need to repurchase them out-of-pocket. Funding to support purchase of things such as outdoor play structures and safety equipment would be very welcome and help reduce turn-over.

In response to a question from Senator Thomas, both Ms. Stacy and Ms. Link said they would work on a proposal for funding that would be necessary to provide adequate start-up grants for those wishing to open in-home child care businesses in their regions. However, it is a challenge to consider the hourly wage question from the perspective of providers who work from 6 am to 6 pm, or later. Dr. Vanover said that some states have established a recommended minimum wage for child care staff and providers which has made their programs easier to market to prospective child care entrepreneurs.

In response to an invitation from Co-Chair Carroll, Amy Neal, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Early Childhood came forward to share some remarks with the task force. She spoke to how confusing the landscape of early childhood education is for families, because there is no system for ages birth to 5 years like there is for K-12

education. This is a critical time for learning and development that is not getting the attention it deserves, which this task force is seeking to correct. Also, confusion comes from calling the best practice of mixed-delivery by several names such as ‘blended funding’ or ‘public-private partnership.’ There are examples of best practices going on throughout the state, such as that of Fayette County shown earlier, that can be used as a model for expanding access in all the communities of the Commonwealth.

With no further business to come before the task force, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m. The next meeting of the task force will be October 20<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m.