

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2022 Interim

October 20, 2022

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 5th meeting of the Early Childhood Education Task Force was held on Thursday, October 20, 2022, at 3:00 p.m., in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Danny Carroll, Co-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; Representative Josie Raymond.

Guests: Juanita M. Webb, Child Care Council of Kentucky.

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

Approval of Minutes – September 22, 2022

Senator Wilson made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2022, meeting of the task force. Senator Schroder seconded and the motion was approved by voice vote.

National Perspective – Early Childhood Education Government Structures

Present from the National Conference of State Legislatures were Alison May, Policy Specialist, Children and Families Program, and Jill Yordy, Senior Policy Specialist, Children and Families Program, provided a national overview of early childhood education governance structures.

Ms. May briefly introduced NCSL and discussed the supports offered to state legislatures. Ms. Yordy defined commonly used organizational terms in children and family programs to clarify how different states use terms such as cabinet, department, agency, office, and division. She also said that research is mixed regarding whether centralized or decentralized governance structures are more effective. Ms. May said states examine governance and administrative structures for many reasons including the need to address fragmentation, improve sustainability, increase efficiency, ensure public accountability, promote quality, and draw attention to the importance of early childhood care and education.

Ms. Yordy said there is increased attention on preventing child abuse and maltreatment, which brings the policy for early childhood education into the spotlight because these are areas where child abuse prevention can be implemented most effectively. Several states have policies that encourage collaboration and coordination across different agencies to align rules, processes, and funding requirements. Thirteen states have a governance structure of consolidation that combines existing programs and divisions into one state agency. The final approach, used in eight states, is the creation of a dedicated early childhood agency that reports directly to the governor's office. They explained these models with more detail by highlighting the specific examples of Georgia, New Mexico, Florida, Missouri, and Hawaii.

The presenters briefly covered some recent legislative attempts at early childhood agency creation and unification from 2021-2022, some of which were successful, some failed to get final passage, and others are pending. While unification would result in a more holistic approach to child and family services, it poses logistical challenges and a lengthy transition process. Ms. May presented several policy considerations that the Kentucky legislature should keep in mind going forward including having clear priorities, engaging a wide range of stakeholders, weighing the pros and cons of making a change, and maintaining clear communication about the impact of change. Ms. Yordy added that they should also keep in mind personnel considerations, the configuration of any new governance strategy, what success will look like, and performing a cost-benefit analysis. Ms. May directed members to NCSL resources and reports that would cover the research presented today in more depth.

In response to a question from Co-chair Carroll, Ms. May said states are entering into these conversations for many reasons including the rising costs of childcare, but also the impact of the pandemic on whether the existing childcare structure is working for families. Ms. Yordy said in her experience legislation is frequently filed in response to a problem identified by a legislature, such as rising cost, workforce development, or need to improve access or quality.

Responding to further questions from Co-chair Carroll, Andrea Day, Assistant Director, Division of Child Care, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, and Dr. Sarah Vanover, Policy and Research Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates, came forward and said distribution of the Child Care Development Block Grant was easy to fold into the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, but the current system isolates early childhood care from the Department of Education and makes it difficult to form partnerships without unified systems, while staying true to individualized funding mandates.

In response to a question from Representative Raymond, Amy Neal, Executive Director, Governor's Office of Early Childhood said the Governor's Office of Early Childhood and the Early Childhood Advisory Council serve an advisory function to coordinate the Division of Early Childhood, Cabinet for Health and Family Services;

Kentucky Department of Education; and the Education, Workforce, and Development Cabinets. This is a coordinated system with great relationships that serve as the only office thinking about the entire early childhood continuum, but it does not administer any services directly. This allows the office to neutrally consider what it takes for each child to have a high-quality early childhood experience. The Early Childhood Advisory Council meets quarterly and the individual departments and cabinets then make individual decisions about priorities.

In response to a question from Senator Wilson, Ms. Day said the Department of Regulated Childcare does inspections, investigates complaints, and serves as enforcement for health and safety standards. Ms. Neal added there is a need for neutral data collection on kindergarten readiness, accountability, and safety.

Co-chair Carroll clarified that this was simply a discussion, and members of the public should not assume from this meeting that the legislature was considering legislation to create a new early childhood agency in Kentucky at this time.

The Federal Child and Adult Care Food Program

Elizabeth Fiehler, Child and Adult Care Food Program Manager, Division of School and Community Nutrition, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), gave an overview of the Federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and how it is implemented in childcare centers, day care homes, head starts, at-risk after school programs, and shelters that take in children and families.

The program is administered by the KDE and reimburses for meals up to age 12, or children of migrant workers up to age 15, and disabled persons up to age 18. Reimbursement rates are determined by household income and change annually. After school programs are eligible if they provide enrichment activities afterschool, on weekends, holidays, or school vacations during the school year. All meals at these programs are reimbursed at the free rate but must be in a school area where at least 50 percent of the student population qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch.

In response to a question from Co-chair Carroll, Ms. Fiehler said all the family day care homes are eligible if they are licensed and certified. The department does not look at whether they are for profit or not.

There are two options for participation, a sponsor organization serves as an intermediary between the center and the state agency or the center can contract directly with the state agency. Sponsoring organizations provide training, technical assistance, monitoring, and filing of claims for the center. This can provide some support to the center, but it also can result in the sponsoring organization taking up to 15 percent of the reimbursement for administrative expenses. For day care homes, the sponsoring organization receives a separate administrative allowance and day care homes are not

allowed to contract directly with the state agency due to federal regulations. The department is federally required to approve any center directly applying for the program that has the financial capability and adequate administration.

Ms. Fiehler briefly illustrated the impact of the pandemic on average daily attendance and the number of centers participating in the CACFP. Andrea Day, Assistant Director, Division of Childcare, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, said that less than half of the certified childcare centers participate in the program, but the data does not include Headstart programs or school based preschool programs that may be participating. Funding was briefly overviewed, but following questions, Ms. Fiehler said she would get a more detailed breakdown of funding based on center type for the members.

In response to questions from Co-chair Carroll, Dr. Sarah Vanover, Policy and Research Director, Kentucky Youth Advocates, said the centers that do not qualify for the CACFP still have to be in alignment with the dietary components of the program. However, they do not get the same level of reimbursement. Headstarts must participate in the CACFP and the inspectors of certified programs are ensuring that they are in alignment. Ms. Fiehler said centers decline to participate because of the feasibility of completing the necessary paperwork. Programs that do not participate require parents to provide a meal for the child, but still must ensure the child has all the required food elements.

Responding to further questions from Co-chair Carroll, Dr. Vanover said that centers do not understand how much support they can get from KDE in administration and what is offered. Ms. Fiehler said there is a dedicated staff at KDE to help new centers complete the paperwork for their initial claims to ensure that it is done properly. While it will not provide any additional profit to centers, it can help reduce costs, and the KDE staff occasionally reaches out to those centers that are not participating to encourage them to consider it. There have been expansions to the federal funding for national school lunch programs, which may trickle down into early childhood and at-risk afterschool programs, but at this time it is unclear if or when that will go into effect. Most funding that has come from the federal government for childcare has been to keep the centers operational rather than expanding quality.

Senator Thomas said he appreciated the discussion today and looks forward to further discussions on both topics with the subject matter experts.

Co-chair Heavrin said Mandy Simpson, Chief Policy Officer, Metro United Way, had extended an offer to the task force to facilitate conversations between members and care providers in order for members to get local perspective and input.

Adjournment

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 Thursday, November 3, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.