



**Board of Early Education and Care**

March 11, 2014

1:00 - 4:00pm

**Nevins Memorial Library**

305 Broadway

Methuen, MA 01844

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**MINUTES**

**Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Present**

Chi-Cheng Huang, M.D., Vice Chairperson

Bridget Rodríguez, designee of Matthew Malone, Ph.D., Secretary of Education

Kathleen Betts, designee of John Polanowicz, Secretary of EOHHS

Elizabeth Childs, M.D.

Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Ph.D.

Joan Wasser Gish, Esq.

Cheryl Stanley, Ed.D. Mary Walachy

Joni Block

Thomas Weber, Commissioner of the Department and Secretary to the Board

**Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Absent:**

J.D. Chesloff, Chairperson

Sharon Scott-Chandler, Esq.

The meeting was called to order at 1:09 p.m.

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair:**

Vice Chairperson Chi-Cheng Huang welcomed attendees to the Nevins Library and stated that Chairperson J.D. Chesloff could not attend. Vice Chairperson Huang reported that some Board members participated in the Haverhill Public Library/Coordinated Family and Community Engagement network's literacy hour conducted at the Haverhill Family Center that morning. Board members read to the participating children, which act he found meaningful and brought home EEC's mission.

**Comments from the Commissioner:**

Commissioner Tom Weber welcomed the public and the Board to the Nevins Library. He commented that EEC's collaboration with libraries is indicative of high quality programming for families and that he was able to speak with a parent who related the impact the program had had on her children. Commissioner Weber recognized Regional Director Anita Moeller and EEC's Lawrence staff and expressed gratitude for their work within the community. Commissioner Weber provided the Board with updates on the following activities:

- **Background Record Check Implementation:** Commissioner Weber explained that EEC is moving forward with implementing the requirements under the legislative modifications to EEC's background record check laws.
- **Differential Licensing:** Commissioner Weber explained that EEC is proceeding with differential licensing to put our resources where they are needed.
- **Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) System:** Commissioner Weber informed the Board that EEC is working to complete the CCFA project. This new system will be a great benefit to the agency.
- **Family Child Care Union Agreement:** The Department is implementing the family child care union contract requirements. Commissioner Weber reiterated that there will be a 2.3% rate increase applied to all child care providers, with an additional 1.7% increase for family child care providers.
- **Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTTT-ELCG):** EEC has reviewed its budgets for years three and four of the RTTT-ELCG and will use leftover funds during the final two years of the grant.
- **Massachusetts Kindergarten Entry Assessment (MKEA):** Commissioner Weber noted that EEC is moving into the third year of the MKEA initiative as a formative assessment project with full day kindergarten classrooms. Adjustments will be made in Cohort Three to relieve the burden of implementation.
- **Professional Development:** EEC is continually working on professional development tasks for child care providers. Commissioner Weber is grateful for the hard work put in by the Department's policy staff in this area.
- **Waitlist Policies and Practices:** EEC discovered deficiencies within the waitlist system during the most recent open access period. EEC is making policy recommendations and guidelines to improve the waitlist process and there should be an opportunity for further access in FY2015.
- **Audit:** Commissioner Weber confirmed that the ongoing performance audit conducted by the Office of the State Auditor appears to be nearing its conclusion. He will share the results with the Board when more information is available.
- **FY2015 Budget:** The Committee on House Ways and Means will issue its budget proposal in April 2014. Commissioner Weber has been spending significant time at the State House meeting with legislators about EEC's FY15 budget. He thanked the field, noting that the Department was in a strong position and encouraged the field to reach out to their legislators now when they can be most impactful.
- **U.S. Secretary of Education:** Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, will visit Massachusetts tomorrow. Commissioner Weber will join Secretary Duncan in Reading and discuss early education and care.

### Statements from the Public\*

*The Board of Early Education and Care makes up to 30 minutes available for persons in the audience to address the Board on specific agenda items. In order to hear as many speakers as possible, the Board limits individuals to three minutes, although written material of any length can be submitted to Chairperson Chesloff or Commissioner Weber.*

- **Luz Montijo, Evelyn Anderson, and the Lawrence CFCE Coordinator, Mary Ann Fleming, from the Greater Lawrence Community Action Council (GLCAC),** thanked board members for travelling to Methuen. They gave an overview of the programs offered by GLCAC and the strong collaborations that they have with community resources, including the Nevins Library whose children's librarian has been an active partner in creating parent modules and programs for families to work on STEM activities and others at home.

Board Member Joni Block thanked the GLCAC for their work to reach families that would be off the radar.

- **Nicolette Nordin Heavey,** testified that she works with GLCAC to produce "Stories in the Streets" a literacy program that bring stories to families in the community, at places such as WIC offices, playgrounds, farmers' markets, and secondhand stores. So far, the program has reached 151 children and their families at a cost of \$2.57 per child with each child receiving a book.
- **Maria Gonzalez Moeller, Chief Operations Officer for Child Care Education Services, The Community Group,** informed the Board that the Community Day Charter Public School provides services for over 900 children, grades K1-8. They rely on vouchers and contracts to support Lawrence families and serve a high concentration of children with high needs. Board Member Mary Walachy asked what the admission policy is for the school. Ms. Moeller responded that the school admits students on a lottery basis.
- **Jennifer LaCroix, Director, Kathy Herward Child Care Center,** requested clarification and reconsideration of the child care tuition discount policy. Ms. LaCroix stated that her staff is highly educated and the center has historically provided a child care tuition benefit to educators' families so as to retain qualified staff. The current policy prohibits this support to staff because programs must offer the lowest child care rate to all children on subsidies.
- **Pat Nelson, Executive Director, Concord Children's Center,** also presented concerns about the policy requiring that discounted child care tuition rates provided to staff must be similarly offered to subsidy recipients. She is concerned that the policy fails to support staff and it harms the goals of the EEC Board.

**End of Public Comment period.**

### **Routine Business:**

- **Approval of January 27, 2014 Joint EEC/ESE Board Meeting Minutes - Vote**

**On a motion duly made and seconded it was:**

**VOTED that the Board of Early Education and Care approve the minutes of the January 27, 2014 Joint EEC/ESE Board Meeting.** The motion passed by a majority vote. Board Member Kathy Betts abstained.

- **Approval of February 11, 2014 Board Minutes – Vote**

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED that the Board of Early Education and Care approve the minutes of the February 11, 2014 Board Meeting.** The motion passed by a majority vote. Board Members Betts, Cheryl Stanley and Joan Wasser Gish abstained.

#### **Board Committee and Advisory Reports:**

- Board Committee Reports:

##### Fiscal Committee:

Board Member Elizabeth Childs reported that the Fiscal Committee met on March 3, 2014. The Committee discussed the family child care union agreement and noted that discussions are ongoing related to the rate increase and union dues. Fiscal Committee members also discussed the audit and the waitlist initiative, and the Committee learned that in January more than 53,402 children were served from the waitlist. Board Member Childs reported that waitlist numbers are slightly down, with approximately 40,278 children on the waitlist. The Committee conversed about how to spend the \$4 million surplus, the FY2014 Caseload Review, and the part-time rate increase for contract providers. IT staff presented the Early Childhood Information System (ECIS) which creates an electronic information link between EEC, ESE, and EOE data.

##### Policy and Research Committee:

Board Member Wasser Gish reported that the Policy and Research Committee also met on March 3, 2014. Gwen Alexander, EEC Program Quality Manager, presented updates on the QRIS Validation Study as it relates to study framework and redesign, timelines, sampling, and hiring a new lead researcher. Ms. Alexander also presented updates to the QRIS Rating Policies, which included information on the appeals and re-rating processes. Katie DeVita and Chris Pond, EEC Educator Provider Support Specialists, updated the Committee on workforce development issues. Board Member Wasser Gish stated that the Provider Qualifications Registry should be modified so that it captures more accurate data that speaks to providers' roles within their agencies.

##### Planning and Evaluation Committee:

Board Member Eleonora Villegas-Reimers reported that the Planning and Evaluation Committee met on March 7, 2014. The Committee discussed EEC's Strategic Plan which was distributed to EEC staff for review and continues to work on and refine the process for the Commissioner's evaluation. Board Member Villegas-Reimers reported that the WIDA conference was held on February 27th at Wheelock College, was well attended and was a great success. The English Language Learners (ELL) Guidelines were presented at the conference and are available on the WIDA webpage and on EEC's website. Massachusetts has been recognized as a leading state in working with the ELL population.

Vice Chairperson Huang thanked the Planning and Evaluation Committee and EEC staff for their work to develop the Strategic Plan.

Advisory Council:

Board Member Block reported that the Advisory Council met on February 24, 2014 at the Massachusetts State House. Seán Faherty, EEC Chief of Staff, presented the 2013 EEC Annual Legislative Report to the Advisory Council who discussed the context, structure, and framework of the report. Board Member Block also noted that Commissioner Weber presented the reported findings and recommendations of the Special Commission, in particular, those related to health and safety, access, quality, rates and workforce, and supporting data systems and data sharing. She noted that members of the Advisory Council provided their feedback on these recommendations and asked Commissioner Weber questions related to the aforementioned topics.

- **Disclosures**

Board Member Eleonora Villegas-Reimers submitted a written disclosure that she works for Wheelock College, a recipient of EEC funding. Board Member Block submitted a written disclosure that her position as the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Coordinator with Brockton Public Schools is funded by EEC.

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

**I. Increase in Part-Time Subsidy Rate – Discussion and Vote**

Relevant resources included in Board Materials:

- *Part Time Rate Increase, PowerPoint Presentation dated March 11, 2014*

William Concannon, EEC Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Finance, presented an increase in the part-time subsidy rate to the Board. In FY2013, EEC entered into negotiations with the Service Employees International Union/Local 509 (SEIU) who represented family child care providers. Deputy Commissioner Concannon explained that the Collective Bargaining Agreement provided for an increase to existing part-time rate effective July 1, 2014 with the current rate for Family Child Care Providers increasing from 50% of the full time rate to 60%. He also noted that this increase is scheduled to occur when CCFA is implemented. If implementation occurs after July 1, 2014, the increase will be paid retroactively.

Deputy Commissioner Concannon stated that EEC has calculated the cost to increase the part time rate and determined that it should be increased for all providers, ensuring consistency and rate equitability. The incremental increase in cost, using the June 2013 part-time caseload data, is approximately \$900,000. Based on the aforementioned statements and explanations, Deputy Commissioner Concannon recommended that the part-time rate be increased from 50% to 60% for all providers.

Board Member Wasser Gish asked whether parent fees will be affected. Deputy Commissioner Concannon replied that the increase will not impact parent fees, but it highlights the need to look at parent fees in the future. Board Member Childs stated that the Fiscal Committee felt strongly that the rate increase should be approved, as long as parent fees were not impacted. She added that the Department should systematically look at parent fees in the future.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED that the Board of Early Education and Care hereby approves the Department's recommended increase to the part-time reimbursement rates from 50% to 60% of the existing full-time daily reimbursement rates paid to providers of subsidized early education and care services, effective July 1, 2014 as presented at the Board meeting of March 11, 2014. The motion passed unanimously.**

**II. QRIS Validation Study Redesign – Discussion**

*Relevant resources included in Board Materials:*

- *QRIS Validation Study, PowerPoint Presentation dated March 11, 2014*
- *QRIS Validation Study Overview, PDF Handout dated March 3, 2014*
- *Massachusetts QRIS Validation Study Framework Revision, PDF Handout dated February 26, 2014*

EEC Program Quality Manager Gwen Alexander reported on changes to the QRIS Validation Study design to the Board in conjunction with Lonnie Kaufman of the University of Massachusetts/Donahue Institute and Joanne Roberts, Ph.D. of the Wellesley Centers for Women. UMass Donahue Institute and EEC have agreed to contract with a new lead researcher, Dr. Roberts. This new study design accommodates timeline changes and incorporates feedback from state and federal advisory members, early education experts, and EEC. Ms. Alexander reported that the proposed change was received positively by U.S. Department of Education advisory and technical assistance providers. Ms. Alexander stated that the changes allow QRIS to meet federal validation objectives for RTTT-ELCG recipients and to meet EEC's objective to gather insight to inform system improvement, policy, and technical assistance.

Board Member Walachy asked about the participation of public school programs in QRIS. Ms. Alexander responded that approximately 300 out of 600 programs participate in QRIS. This ratio mirrors participation by community based-programs in EEC's mixed-delivery system. Board Member Betts asked what the numbers would look like in terms of continuity of care. Dr. Roberts responded that the study will assess children in the fall and spring reflecting 6 month intervals and that the study will over-sample to account for attrition. Ms. Alexander added that toddlers are being assessed in social-emotional areas while preschool children are being assessed in all areas. Consent forms have been utilized to allow for the eventual longitudinal use of data in order to reassess children again in third grade.

Board Member Block asked how the study will ensure that it reaches a diverse group of children, i.e. those with an IEP, ELLs, etc. Dr. Roberts responded that the theory behind random sampling is a longstanding principle of research to ensure diversity of a sampling population. She noted that random assignments ensure a fair classroom sample. Assessors will have no predisposition upon entering a classroom and will only test those randomly assigned; they will stop if a child shows distress. Vice Chairperson Huang asked whether the study would be disseminated and eventually published in a peer-reviewed journal. Dr. Roberts responded that the ultimate goal is to publish.

Board Member Bridget Rodríguez asked about the study's impact on Dual Language Learners and ELLs, questioning whether the study would be in languages other than English.

Board Member Wasser Gish reported that the Policy and Research Committee recognized this is an ambitious undertaking and stressed the need to encourage participation. Board Member Betts questioned whether how the study will demonstrate the importance of children being in these programs and showing growth. Ms. Alexander responded that the results of the Environment Rating Scales visits will be released soon and will show impact on quality. Commissioner Weber expressed his appreciation for the hard work involved in revising the study.

### **III. Income-Eligible Early Education and Care Contracted Providers – Discussion**

#### Relevant resources included in Board Materials:

- *Income Eligible Contract Provider Outreach, PowerPoint Presentation dated March 11, 2014*

Carole Meehan, EEC Caseload Budget Manager, together with Deputy Commissioner Concannon, presented research regarding income-eligible early education and care contracted providers to the Board. Ms. Meehan stated that in monthly projections, EEC assumes 100% contract utilization which assists in guarding against financial deficits. EEC projections assume that flexible funding slots are funded through underutilization of contracted slots. EEC's preference is to have contract utilization percentages fall between 90% and 95%. During the current fiscal year, however, contract utilization percentages did not reach 90% until March 2014. Ms. Meehan explained that contract underutilization is contributing to the projected Income Eligible surplus.

EEC evaluated utilization data from December 31, 2013 to find underutilization patterns. With no obvious pattern discovered, the focus shifted to the 170 contract providers. Ms. Meehan noted that EEC analyzed 20 vendors with the lowest slots filled and then focused its outreach efforts on this group. She stated that EEC contacted these providers and asked questions regarding challenges filling slots, steps taken to fill slots, communications with local child care resource and referral agencies, and whether unfilled slots should be taken down. Ms. Meehan reported that the contracted providers' responses fell into several major themes: waitlist issues, difficulties in getting parents to complete the certification process, families walking away after they find out that there is a parent fee, families rejecting contracted slots in order to wait for a voucher, affordability, documentation of income issues, and translation issues.

Board Member Childs stated that this research highlights issues with the waitlist and clarifies support for EEC's current attendance policy. She noted that there is a balance between the need for parents to work and EEC to verify attendance, as these are federal mandates. Board Member Childs added that EEC is working hard to look at cultural differences and its impact on access to care, as well as the importance of utilizing every dollar. She emphasized that it is incumbent on EEC to effectively manage these contracts.

Board Member Stanley stated that EEC needs to support those providers that are in competition with Boston Public Schools and Head Start programs to help them reinvent themselves to provide other types of programming, such as after school and out-of-school programs. Board Member Wasser Gish asked what proportion of flex slots are used effectively and whether those slots can be used as contract slots. Deputy Commissioner Concannon responded that EEC can move slots between accounts, but that having slots in the flex pool for any program to access has worked very well for the Department of Children and Families, and EEC would like to use this model.

**On motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED that the meeting adjourn at 3:03 p.m., subject to the call of the Vice Chairperson. The motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas L. Weber  
Commissioner of the Department and  
Secretary to the Board