



**Board of Early Education and Care
Wednesday, August 18, 2021
9 AM – 3 PM
Department of Early Education and Care**

MINUTES

Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Present

Nonie Lesaux, Chairperson

Jim Peyser, Secretary of Education

Samantha L. Aigner-Treworgy, Commissioner of Early Education and Care (EEC) and Secretary to the Board

Carolyn Kain, J.D., Designee for HHS Secretary Marylou Sudders

David Cruise

Joni Block

Sheila Balboni

Maura Seigel

Nicki Ruiz de Luzuriaga

Jamella Lee

The meeting was called to order at 9:15 AM.

Chairperson Lesaux welcomes new Board members. Commissioner and Board members give introduction.

Chairperson Lesaux states that the Board retreat is a chance to go deeper. We will take advantage of retreat format and have lots of discussion, questions, and comments. Chairperson Lesaux states this is a chance to step back and grow mutual understanding of where we are as an agency. This is an unprecedented time and the agency not used to this magnitude, which does bring challenges. This is an opportunity to bring together vision and investment.

Secretary Peyser stated that this is an important strategic time but also a strange time. A lot of work from a policy and program point of view to help children and families while also thinking a couple steps ahead to the system we want to build.

Commissioner stated it is important to align the various functions of the agency. Massachusetts was the first state to create a new governance model for a unified vision for improvement in child outcomes.

Commissioner provided an overview of EEC programs and services. Commissioner discussed the Department's strategic plan and how the Department must re-orient our systems while making sure providers and children are safe; make sure we are investing in access at the community level; ensure we are working with communities and stakeholders; and look at how quality interplays with strategic direction. Commissioner presented on what are we doing for the individuals within our programs and how the Department will engage the field. We need to look at programs themselves and what their business model is. Look at programs as interconnected. Big driver is to make investments to stabilize programs. Commissioner stated that the labor shortage is due to poor compensation and we must look at how we help employers during a difficult time.

There was a discussion on the current oversight of the agency and how easily parents and educators can identify the services that they need. There was a discussion on the Professional Development Centers (PDCs), which are private entities that provide regional coaching services. There was a discussion on gaps between supply and demand and how there is an opportunity to increase quality of workforce conditions.

Commissioner began discussing the different federal funding streams that are now available as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Federal money currently dictates that we have to pay per child. The Department is currently paying based on enrollment not attendance for the foreseeable future. Commissioner discussed how the Department is recalibrating roles across the Department and the Secretariat to ensure the Department plays a more active role. There was discussion how classroom-based funding will help us lay the groundwork for a shift in the future and provide more flexible options. There was discussion around universal preschool and initiatives that are being explored at the federal level.

Chairperson Lesaux paused the discussion to take stock on where we are. Identified key items including stabilization of the child care field, flexibility in new contracts re-bids, and taking a deeper dive into data systems and how to respond to data. The Commissioner stated we need to look at stability and incentives for new programs to come in. Also how do we covert that flexibility - not just feasible but parent driven. There was then a discussion on the C3 formula

Jocelyn Bowne gave a presentation on leveraging data to inform and monitor innovation. Ms. Bowne provided data on the number of children and families in the birth through five realm and discussed the overall capacity of the system. Ms. Bowne highlighted key outcomes from the Department's strategic plan goals, including equitable access and ensuring children are on track to 3rd grade success. There was a discussion on rates and how federal rules set benchmarks for rates that need to be tied to the market rate or an alternative methodology. There was further discussion on market rates and how it impacts parent fees. The Commissioner outlined problems with the federal benchmark of 7% for parent fees. Outlined that the Department needs to make sure rates are meeting quality.

Ms. Bowne provided data on the early child care workforce and highlighted that there is strong workforce diversity. Workforce survey asked educators about goals and engaging with higher education. There was discussion on the Department's high education scholarships and how they are under-utilized. There needs to be greater flexibility in requirements. There was discussion on the current age of the workforce and also different models on recruitment and retention.

Ms. Bowne provided data on the percentage of investment in subsidies and the various ways programs have engaged in program supports. There was discussion on program compliance and where the majority of issues reside. The Commissioner stated that a majority of non-compliances are paperwork and physical facility requirements. She stated we are in the process of revising our regulations and our licensing database. The Commissioner stated there is a behavior change required to focus on technical assistance and support for programs.

At 12:51 P.M., the group broke for lunch. The meeting resumed: 1:35 P.M.

Chairperson Lesaux stated that the plan for the afternoon was to build on morning conversation and turn a lens on private/public partnership. The Commissioner stated the Department is thinking about different types of partnerships and looking at ways we can defray cost of private entities. Commissioner discussed various partnerships including with Neighborhood Villages that has offered various services for families, including babysitting, food delivery, etc. There was a discussion on career pathways and ensuring the Department educates individuals on careers in education and allow for meetings with job seekers to provide guidance. The group then broke into smaller groups to discuss strategies for innovation around public-private partnerships. The group reconvened and shared out thoughts around strategic innovation in partnerships.

Chairperson Lesaux stated that as the Department begins thinking about post-COVID world, we need to get acclimated to the new landscape while maintaining the direction of the strategic plan. The Board will support the Commissioner to build agency capacity to perform the work.

Chairperson Lesaux thanked the Commissioner for arranging the retreat and said they will begin planning for September. Asked the Board to be thinking about potential sub-committees.

Chairperson Lesaux stated the Department is well positioned to do some strong work with a good team. The Board will continue to support the Commissioner and her team.

Meeting adjourned at 2:59 P.M.