

Name/Organization	Topic/Comments
<p>Beth Sidel, 4 The Love of Learning Preschool</p>	<p>Universal Pre-K: Dear Governor Healy, Commissioner Kershaw, Secretary of Education Tutwiler and Members of the Board;</p> <p>As an Early Childhood Educator with a B.A and M.Ed, and small business owner who has been teaching preschool for over 28 years in a variety of settings including center based, public, and most currently owning and operating a preschool under an FCC license, I am extremely concerned with what I have been hearing in regards to universal preschool. I am thankful for the attention the Early Childhood Education field has received since the Covid shutdown, but the recent money that is being given to towns to increase the access to pre-k is very possibly going to put thousands of private businesses, mostly run by women, out of business.</p> <p>I keep hearing a “mixed delivery” system will be used, inclusive of a variety of types of programs, but it seems many communities are unaware of what is already available in their towns. Providers in both FCC and Centers across the state are extremely concerned. I have strongly advocated for several years that highly educated, veteran providers are busy running their high quality programs instead of getting involved in advocating for the field. As someone who is on the ground running a high quality classroom, I completely understand. They are putting every ounce of energy into running their high quality programs. Advocating is a 2nd full-time job on top of a job that already entails wearing many hats (business owner, lead educator, chef, nurse, janitor, EI specialist, etc). Unfortunately, because of that, the picture at the state level is skewed and very different than what is actually happening on the ground.</p> <p>Did you know that while it may be true that many families are looking for care, I have been seeing hundreds of programs all over the state advertising openings for several months (especially for ages 2 and over). Both veteran providers who have never had to advertise for the 20-30 years in business and newer providers. Not every town is in a childcare desert. Flooding the market and opening new programs, both public and private, is going to hurt many businesses.</p> <p>It is shortsighted to take away creative freedom from programs. Children and families are diverse learners and the programs available to them should mirror that. Forcing all programs to use boxed curriculum that is often designed by people who are not educated in early childhood education and most likely have never stepped foot into a classroom, or run a classroom, is putting the future of the children in the</p>

	<p>Commonwealth at a disadvantage, NOT an advantage. Have you consulted with a wide variety of Educated teachers who are right now on the ground and in classrooms?? Visited a variety of classrooms instead of returning to not only the same classrooms, but the same type of classrooms over and over?</p> <p>I have consulted with Peter Gray, who is a strong play advocate in the field as well as a retired psychology professor from Boston College. Along with many other experts in the field, he is a strong advocate for play is learning in preschool classrooms as opposed to the academic style that seems to be getting promoted from the state level recently. I believe classrooms should have balance and curriculum should be as individualized as possible. As an expert myself, I have been told over and over that the children I send to kindergarten are MORE than prepared, and public school teachers, who have public preschool programs available to them, choose to send their children to me. I design my own curriculum and tailor my program to the children’s needs and interests. I have done this without “fancy” boxed curriculum which I personally think is not high quality, and without hundreds of thousands of dollars. Children in my program have time and space to problem solve, gain independence, lead, be outdoors in nature, eat organic food, sleep and rest their minds and bodies, form close relationships with peers and teachers to become a true community, create, get excited about learning, and continue the journey to reaching their full potential. Please consider the whole entire picture of what could be lost turning preschool programs into cookie cutter programs and only offering these kinds of programs “free” to children and families. In the end, it will be the children who lose. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your response.</p>
<p>Lisa Martin, Side By Side Preschool</p>	<p>U Florida Lastinger Early Learning initiative: Hello, My name is Lisa Martin I have been the Owner/Director at Side By Side Preschool, Inc. since 1995.</p> <p>Because I am not able to attend this meeting (got the email just today 2/13/24 at 2:20p.m.)</p> <p>I am writing to have my support of the U Florida Lastinger Early Learning initiative (Flamingo Early Learning) heard.</p> <p>This initiative was recommended to my by my licenser via email I believe sometime back in 2022.</p> <p>I am just finishing my 2nd year working with Flamingo and to say it has been a great success would be an understatement.</p>

I do find it unfortunate that I have not once heard from anyone at EEC to check in and inquire how this initiative is going for me, or what my thoughts are on this initiative they you recommended.

Yet I am under the impression there are decisions in regards to putting and ind to this initiative! I feel strongly this would be unfair and those of us involved should be heard!

Please do not make an uninformed decision. Yes, that is what it would be if no one speaks to those of us directly involved.

My Center has invested so much time and energy to embrace this initiative and we have had huge success with its implementation, I ask that you please read on.

Coming off COVID was extremely difficult for many centers. In our case I was left with the feeling of knowing I needed something to help me but so much was going on I could not put my finger on what it was exactly. Then came this opportunity to work with Flamingo and That was a game changer!

I have been in the field for some 44 years, I have owned my own center for what will be 30 years in September 2024. For the first time, I felt EEC was making strides to find something that benefited each individual center. I felt supported (having been recommended by my licenser).

My center has put an enormous amount of work and dedication into the training, COPs, courses and more. Even though EEC has not offered any PDPs or CEUs to us we gladly continued because if the great befits.

I have recently become the first Cohort 3 Lastinger Certified Coach and my center has benefited greatly from the course work. This will have such lasting positive effects for my entire center. I will now be able to utilize what I have learned and bring it back to my staff to help them become "Coaches". Once that happens, they will be able to Coach newer staff and many practices will even flow into the classroom where we can use the strategies when working with children.

The observation tools Flamingo has shared with us include breakdowns so teachers feel heard and supported. It brings feedback to them with concrete data displays and opportunities for them to feel as if they can reach out for anything they need; instead of being judged while a Director does a random observation, sometimes with no objective in mind. One of the biggest rewards as a Director/Coach is when my Teachers come to me and ask for guidance. We work together getting

to an end result that they examined, strategies are introduced and it becomes very beneficial for the classroom. Even children are benefiting from this initiative!

My staff meetings are now a Community of Practice where everyone has equity of voice and we are so much more connected.

I have much more input to share on how important the work Flamingo has done truly is, I am early scratching the surface here because I got late notice about the Board meeting and I want to be heard! And you need it by 5PM

I welcome and encourage you to reach out to me to discuss this further. I mean, you were the ones who recommended I take this on in the first place, there should be some equity of voice.

I am also not alone, many centers from all over Ma. Who have worked with Flamingo feel strongly that our options matter.

This initiative makes sense, please do not just vote to do away with it when it actually has made a difference for so many.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Sorry about the grammar and typos, but I'm working fast here.

Best Regards,
Lisa Martin
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February 14th, 2024

Good Afternoon EEC Board Members, Secretary Peyser, Commissioner Kershaw, Chair Belsito and EEC Board Members,



My name is Gillian Budine. I am here today to represent the families in our communities of Erving, Leverett, New Salem, Shutesbury and Wendell. Five very small, rural towns. I am the Coordinator for our EEC funded Coordinated Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grant program through the Union 28 Schools. We have named our program the Community Network for Children (CNC) Program.

Today, I would like to invite you, Board members and Commissioner Kershaw, to join me and other fellow CFCE Program Coordinators in a conversation about the role of the CFCE grant funded programs and the families with the youngest children in the commonwealth that interact with our programs. The CFCE funded program addresses the developmental, social, and emotional, and community support needs of young children and their families to foster healthy development, reduce caregiver isolation, and promote early learning success. CFCE programs are a crucial hub of support and resources for families, especially in our small rural communities. With limited access to programs, many families with infants and toddlers at home rely on CFCE programs to provide enrichment, socialization and opportunities to reduce isolation through trusted relationships with CFCE program staff. CFCE programs are the local and trusted web of support, warm handoffs, help accessing care, builders of relationships and partners that can support EEC with family engagement, connecting families to resources and supporting families with transitioning to early education and care, and school.

As we strive to maintain and build capacity within our communities to engage and support families we recognize that we can no longer do so without additional financial support. The CFCE grant has been reduced or level funded for the last ten years. We would like to have a conversation about increasing the financial support through EEC to ensure the web that supports and engages our families, programs and partners in our community can continue to be a strong and resilient EEC funded program. Please let me know when we can join together in this conversation.

As I conclude my testimony I would like to share a few recent comments from families participating in our CNC programs (see next page).

Thank you for taking the time to listen.

Sincerely,
Gillian Budine
Community Network for Children/ CFCE Program
New Salem Wendell RSD
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Comments from participants of the Community Network for Children Program (CNC) serving the small rural communities in Erving, Leverett, New Salem, Wendell and Shutesbury, with support from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant.

Submitted by Gillian Budine, CNC Program Coordinator

“There are so many ways my children and myself have benefited from the CNC programs. From the enriching storytimes and Nature programs to the at home Ready Rosie program to the Children's Closet to the help with monthly diapers and wipes. This program has been amazing for my family and our community. Our lives would not be nearly as rich, social, vibrant, imaginative and creative without it!”

“Our son wasn’t speaking much at the age of 2. We spoke to our CNC contact who had us fill out some assessment forms. Based on that, we were directed to REACH who was able to provide services. In less than a year, our son now speaks above what is expected. This process would not have been as easy, or dealt with as quickly, had it not been for the CNC.”

“When my kids were first born CNC was pivotal in building community and finding resources. As they are older we appreciate the events CNC puts on, like the clothing closet. CNC makes it feel like the community really cares about families.”

“Playgroups are an important part of my children’s development. The routine they provide in our child’s life is also important. The social and emotional aspect is crucial in my toddlers growth.”

“The programs and staff have been an invaluable support to me and my family throughout the year. The consistency and variety of programming is crucial to my children's social and early development with peers. Having an outlet to meet and talk to other families with similar aged children is also such an incredible opportunity. As a stay at home mom, daily life with children on your own can feel isolating, but these programs allow for a sense of support and camaraderie as parents as well as new learning for both my children and myself of activities we can do at home to help encourage appropriate development of early childhood skills. Thank you for supporting these programs and the amazing staff that run them!”





February 12, 2024

Public Comment Submission: February 14th Department of Early Education and Care Board Meeting

Dear Commissioner Kershaw and Department of Early Education and Care board members,

I'm writing to thank you again for providing a reprieve for subsidy providers by permitting us to close between Christmas and New Year's over the past few years. Aside from rate increases, this gesture has made the most significant difference in the quality of life for our early education workforce and is a welcome retention mechanism.

I kindly request you consider making the same decision this year as soon as possible so centers and families can plan their annual closure calendars. Whether or not the December dates are approved will impact whether Friday, July 5th will be an approved closure, and we need to inform families about summer closures as soon as possible.

Finally, if you permit me to be bold on behalf of our early education workforce, I would ask you to consider institutionalizing approved closures between Christmas and New Year's so we can plan accordingly, advertise this perk with potential employees, and so our exhausted workforce can rely on this time off with their families.

With respect and appreciation for your service to our Commonwealth,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lauren Cook". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lauren Cook
Chief Executive Officer