

Shape

January 11, 2022

1:00PMPM to 4:00PM

Virtual Meeting:

NOTE: This meeting will be broadcasted over EEC’s YouTube Channel:[*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD4wK4bL9kU*](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/doe.us13.list-manage.com/track/click?u=74ce63412efa7f6c8b38b2606&id=3081a8f631&e=e12ea8ac36__;!!CUhgQOZqV7M!xpgknzrqxFeassxVNCKXMdpnRYZRbINqXXJxQ6iVXC3J1rRXo5-PNy329EgMJ2KufOFyrAZVtEFV2BM$)

**AGENDA**

**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

Joni Block

Paul Belsito

Jamella Lee

Mora Segal

David Cruise

Alison Schonwald

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

Sheila Balboni

Nikki Ruiz

**The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM.**

**AGENDA:**

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

1. COVID Response - Discussion
2. Infrastructure Support
   1. C3 Operational Grants & Workforce Pipelines – Discussion

**Routine Business:**

* Approval of minutes from November Board Meeting – Vote
* Approval of minutes from November Emergency Board Meeting – Vote
* Approval of minutes from December Board Meeting – Vote

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair**

Chairperson Lesaux welcomed the Board to the first Board meeting of the year. The Chairperson shared that the agenda is reflective of the ongoing public health landscape and its impact on the workforce and the Early Education and Care system, which requires flexibility and agility. The Chairperson acknowledged that a lot of public comment was received in advance of today's meeting and that the agenda should enlighten the Board and the field regarding the continued dialogue.

Chairperson Lesaux provided an overview of the agenda items.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Peyser’s comments focused on that day’s announcements made by the Governor, stating that the Administration had placed an order for 26 million rapid antigen tests to be delivered over the next three months, prioritized to support K-12 and early education and child care. He shared that there was uncertainty about the timing of the delivery due to ongoing distribution and logistics issues. Secretary Peyser discussed the updated public health guidance regarding testing and quarantine protocols. He encouraged consulting mass.gov, as well as EEC and DESE websites, for specific guidance related to K-12 and child care . Secretary Peyser highlighted the updated date change for the indoor mask policy for K-12, which does not affect existing EEC policy.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy thanked the Chairperson and Secretary and wished all a happy new year. Chairperson Aigner-Treworgy stated that today's discussion will focus on strategies to ensure that childcare infrastructure can remain operational to care for children, as well as the intentional strategies to support the critical workforce to deliver high-quality care and education.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy highlighted that EEC released updated guidance for providers following the release of updated CDC guidance but stressed that, unlike early educators, EEC providers are independent operators and have the discretion to make the decisions on how they apply EEC guidance. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy reiterated that the emergency regulations allow EEC to apply specific requirements pertaining to PPE but do not allow mandates regarding closures.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy pointed to the appendix of the Board materials which shows continued enrollment numbers for the subsidy system. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy shared that EEC is working with stakeholders to understand the fluctuations in enrollment.

**Routine Business:**

* Approval of minutes from November 9, 2021 Board Meeting – Vote: Approved with Joni Block and Alison Schonwald abstaining due to absence
* Approval of minutes from November 29, 2021 Emergency Board Meeting – Vote: Approved with Alison Schonwald abstaining due to absence
* Approval of minutes from December 14, 2021 Board Meeting – Vote: approved with one amendment
  + Chairperson Peyser – edited the last sentence of his comments to read 79 million.

1. **COVID Response – Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy reflected on EECs response to the COVID pandemic over the past two years and discussed how what we have learned informs the implementation of sustainable systems to allow programs to operate safely and be responsive, protect the workforce, and instill confidence in children and families during recovery. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an overview of the steps and actions taken throughout the COVID pandemic which are reflected in the materials provided. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy highlighted that the theme of EEC’s response is the ability to quickly evaluate and understand the needs of the community and to make quick decisions to start a system that could stabilize in order to grow and build over time.

There was discussion about how EEC's partnerships allowed children and families access to community resources and provided EEC with a unique opportunity to examine our role in responding to the needs of the community.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy acknowledged that the subsidized childcare system plays a critical role for vulnerable families to access childcare and that there were challenges in that system that needed to be addressed to ensure support to families. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an overview of the subsidy policy changes and investments that eliminated barriers for families and maintained stability for programs.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed how EEC’s ability to be responsive and agile allowed for an unprecedented response to access infrastructure. She reiterated EECs commitment to listening, working, and building while gaining understanding of how to grow stable systems in order to sustain during recovery.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy introduced Deputy Commissioner Caitlin Molina and provided an overview of Deputy Commissioner Molina’s newly developed role in childcare operations.

Deputy Commissioner Molina thanked the Board for their advocacy and acknowledged that the current surge is creating a challenging time for the field. Deputy Commissioner Molina discussed data showing COVID incidents as reported to EEC. She shared that, through EEC’s work with DPH to aggregate trends and to determine opportunities to provide better support to programs, an immediate opportunity was identified to develop protocols and to enhance PPE distribution to programs statewide. Deputy Commissioner Molina shared that the operating materials and protocols have been well received by programs and has allowed the programs to continue to operate independently as businesses with an understanding of the public health guidance thereby decreasing their dependency on local boards of health and the Department of Public Health. Deputy Commissioner Molina provided an overview of COVID mitigation layers and highlighted the dedicated EEC mobile PCR testing sites, expanded pool testing, and the development of rapid antigen testing program through partnership with Neighborhood Villages. Deputy Commissioner Molina shared that EEC is working with federal partners and Neighborhood Villages to develop protocols to support programs with a robust rapid antigen testing strategy, which will be finalized in the coming weeks.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy reiterated that feedback on protocols is being collected through the Commissioner’s inbox and an FAQ will be released in order to refine the protocols. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy emphasized that testing strategies will be critical to integrate into all operational strategies in childcare in order to maintain safe, healthy operations and acknowledged that a multi-pronged strategy is essential moving forward. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy asked for any questions or comments from the Board.

Board member Belsito expressed thanks to the Commissioner and the field and provided comment to recognize the daily vulnerabilities experienced by programs and the ongoing work that needs to be done to provide support. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy acknowledged there is an opportunity to transition the urgent response to the pandemic and address long-standing infrastructure needs.

Board member Kain expressed thanks to the Commissioner and the team for their response to the needs of families and the field in an unpredictable timeline.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy clarified that statute requires DPH to report individual COVID cases in childcare which is why there is reporting through LEAD with DPH. EEC requires reporting of any transmissible disease and any incident that impacts operations and will release an FAQ to clarify the COVID reporting to EEC and DPH. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy is committed to working with DPH and the legislature to alleviate some of the challenges with individual reporting.

Board member Belsito asked for clarification on how providers can leverage all available resources. Deputy Commissioner Molina clarified that all programs can access PPE distribution through their LEAD portal. Neighborhood Villages continues to accept new enrollment for testing strategies and a sign-up link is included in the Board materials provided. Deputy Commissioner Molina expressed gratitude for the teams who are building these systems, encouraged patience, and welcomed feedback.

Break until 2:30PM

Chairperson Lesaux welcomed the Board back from break and introduced the next agenda item.

1. Infrastructure Support

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy highlighted operational components, including the extension of C3 operational grants. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided information for programs that previously participated on how to recertify and shared that an email will be released with instructions for new programs to apply. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy acknowledged that the conversations surrounding a bonus structure has been impacted by operational considerations related to the COVID surge in order not to overburden programs with administrative requirements.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy introduced Jocelyn Bowne, Associate Commissioner for Research and Program Innovation.

* + - * 1. C3 Operational Grants & Workforce Pipelines – Discussion

Associate Commissioner Bowne discussed operational grant metrics and shared that participation has increased with over 80% of eligible programs participating with an expected expenditure of over $200M. Associate Commissioner Bowne pointed to updated participation rates contained in the Board materials and shared that data continues to show that the formula is functioning as anticipated. Associate Commissioner Bowne provided an overview of the operational workforce bonus structure and shared feedback received from the field collected through applications and survey responses on how to structure the workforce bonuses and how to support larger workforce challenges, including hiring, recruiting, and retaining qualified educators. Associate Commissioner Bowne shared that the most common response from providers is that increasing salary is critical for hiring and retaining qualified educators and she highlighted that providers who report having sufficient staff are providing more kinds of different strategies.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy highlighted that the interconnectedness between programs’ operational funding and the pipeline of qualified educations available to hire is complex and requires simultaneous investment in funding and in the pipeline itself in order to have impact. Chairperson Lesaux acknowledged that there are multiple pathways within the pipeline.

Associate Commissioner Bowne provided an overview of the short- and long-term goals of the bonus structure for GSA and FCC and discussed recommendations from Third Sector to support recruitment and retention, as well as the data and documentation that will be collected.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy highlighted that, according to feedback from the field and Third Sector, the challenge is flexibility on the data used to qualify for the bonus and more emphasis on the deeper analysis of how the money was spent to ensure that objectives are met as well as creating a baseline to move forward is needed.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an overview of the workforce pipeline updates and highlighted that the multi-pronged investment into components in the current system ensures a stronger response. She shared that expanding access to higher education is vital, as is looking into EEC’s role of driving the professional competency metric used to qualify educators. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an update on the current initiatives and strategies, as well as the success metrics. She highlighted the Professional Pathways program that was launched in the Fall in partnership with Neighborhood Villages that helps interested individuals navigate multiple systems to identify the appropriate coursework. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy recognized that there are challenges in defining a competency-based approach and the strategies used to measuring competency and discussed the need for a common framework to differentiate between a competency-based training program from program supports. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed the challenge of measuring achieved competency at scale.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy shared that EEC was provided $500,000 in public private funding in the FY21 budget designed to meet the urgent needs of the field, which includes building access to a workforce in order to sustain and rebuild the longstanding workforce issues. This funding can accelerate our learning about a critical component of the workforce timeline and requires external expertise and partnership with the Board. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy proposed restarting the Workforce Committee with the objective of helping inform an RFP to leverage the $500,000 public private trust fund included in the FY21 budget to set benchmarks, definitions, and support the field with a global vision from EEC to measure overall investment in the system long term.

Chairperson Lesaux added that innovation is needed to intersect between practice and workforce development with a lens to scale. Chairperson Lesaux discussed the role and goals of the Committee.

Board member Segal expressed appreciation on the data pertaining to the professional pathways updates. She discussed the need for understanding the goal of a project when measuring success and creating a framework for success and cycles of data driven improvement. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy shared that there is a challenge in articulating the professional ladder for educators and measurements for preparation programs to bolster the systems. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy acknowledged that past measures of program quality have led to a compliance mindset rather than a continuous quality improvement mindset and she shared that there is an opportunity to demonstrate success in a different way.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy shared that the Board provides a broad perspective that is invaluable to incorporate a cohesive, comprehensive look at available opportunities.

Board member Block reflected on lessons learned and welcomed the opportunity to move forward.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy and Chairperson Lesaux shared that next steps will be to organize and schedule Committee meetings and the information will be shared on the Board website.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy reiterated that data regarding general caseload numbers and an update on parent fee implementation is included in the appendix of the Board materials. She reminded programs that fees will begin to be assessed but collection should be flexible. She encouraged programs to reach out to subsidy administrators and to EEC with any feedback, questions, or concerns. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy shared that more information regarding caseload numbers and engagement with CCR&R’s will be discussed at the February Board meeting. Chairperson Lesaux thanked the Board, Commissioner, and Deputy Commissioner, and encouraged all providers to stay in touch.

Meeting adjourned 3:30PM.