

Board of Early Education and Care
January 15, 2025
1:00 PM – 4:00PM

**Department of Early Education and
Care, Central Office**
50 Milk Street, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02109
<https://www.youtube.com/c/EECMass>

Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Present

Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education
Amy Kershaw, Commissioner
Paul Belsito, Chair
Maria Gonzalez Moeller, Vice-Chair
Jamella Lee, via phone
George Atanasov
Dr. Kimberly D. Lucas, via phone
Jennifer James Price
Linda D. Sagor, M.D., M.P.H.
Carolyn Kain, J.D., Designee for HHS Secretary Kate Walsh
Nikki Ruiz de Luzuriaga

Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Not Present

Cheryl Travers

MINUTES

Welcome and Comments from the Chair

Chair Belsito provided welcoming comments and provided an overview of the agenda.

Comments from the Secretary

Secretary Tutwiler provided welcoming comments. Secretary Tutwiler reflected on commitments for the new year and accomplishments from the past year. Secretary Tutwiler provided an update regarding the upcoming Year 1 Report from the Inter-Agency Taskforce and the status of the Governor's budget.

Comments from the Commissioner

Commissioner Kershaw echoed Secretary Tutwiler's comments regarding the upcoming release of the Governor's budget and shared her perspective on the Inter-Agency Taskforce. Commissioner Kershaw discussed her participation in a legislative briefing convened by United Way of Mass Bay Shared Services Initiative and shared how the Initiative is supporting family child care businesses. Commissioner Kershaw shared that Board Member Kim Lucas was a researcher on the evaluation of the Initiative's work and invited Board Member Lucas to share

the key findings of the research. Board Member Lucas thanked the participants of the research study and shared information regarding the impact of the Shared Services programs, as well as identified challenges. Commissioner Kershaw commented on EEC's commitment to understanding the unique needs of family child care providers. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the ECE Scholarship Program and shared that next month's Board meeting will be held in Framingham.

Statements from the Public

Chair Belsito acknowledged that public comment was received by email and was distributed to the Board prior to the meeting.

Jane Cohen, Early Childhood Alliance with Framingham Public School provided public comment in support of Coordinated Family and Community Engagement programs (CFCE) and the Parent Plus Program. She provided an overview of the services provided by Early Childhood Alliance and shared how CFCE funded programs assist children and families in the community.

Routine Business:

- Approval of Minutes from December 18, 2024 Meeting – VOTE
 - Approved with amendment that Board Member Jennifer James Price was not in attendance

Items for Discussion and Action:

- Child Care Financial Assistance FY25 Reimbursement Rate Increase

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Amy Checkoway-EEC Senior Associate Commissioner for Policy, Research, & Data, Ashley White-EEC Director of Research, and Christel Lantin-EEC Budget Director, and provided an overview of the proposed Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) FY25 reimbursement rate increase. Senior Associate Commissioner Checkoway outlined the topics that would be discussed and noted that detailed information regarding the development of the rate increase proposals and updates to cost models was previously shared at the November and December Board meetings. Senior Associate Commissioner Checkoway defined CCFA rates and the factors that are considered when setting the rates. Senior Associate Commissioner Checkoway discussed the significant CCFA rate increases and changes implemented by the Board in FY24. Senior Associate Checkoway provided an update regarding the use of the federally approved cost-methodology for FY25. Director White shared the guiding principles behind the proposed CCFA reimbursement rate increases. Director White provided a detailed summary of both options for reimbursement rate increases, explained the differences between the options, and shared EEC's recommendation for Option 1. Co-Chair Moeller and Director White clarified the estimated cost amounts included in the proposals. Co-Chair Moeller, Commissioner Kershaw, and Chair Belsito expressed thanks to the Legislature for the increased funding and EEC for their work on the proposals.

- VOTE
 - FY25 Reimbursement Rate Increase for Center-Based Programs and Family

Child Care Systems Providing Subsidized Early Education and Care Services
approved unanimously with roll call vote

- FY25 Student Loan Repayment

Commissioner Kershaw provided background information on funding provided in the FY25 budget for the early child care workforce, including \$7.5 million in funding previously approved by the Board in October to expand and support existing scholarship programs. Commissioner Kershaw discussed an additional \$7.5 million in funding for a loan forgiveness program to be allocated in partnership with the Department of Higher Education. Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Jocelyn Bowne-EEC Deputy Commissioner for Research, Innovation, and Supports, Ellen Grondine-EEC Senior Associate Commissioner for Workforce Development, and Erica Morin-EEC General Counsel. Deputy Commissioner Bowne explained the language that was included in the FY25 budget regarding student loan repayment.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne provided an overview of the Legislative language establishing the student loan repayment program. Senior Associate Grondine discussed the program details and eligibility criteria for the student loan repayment program. Senior Associate Grondine provided an overview of the timeline for the student loan repayment program and detailed next steps. General Counsel Morin presented the Student Loan Repayment Motion to the Board for vote and approval.

Chair Belsito expressed approval of the partnership and coordination across the Secretariat. Chair Belsito and Deputy Commissioner Bowne clarified about eligibility.

Board Member Lucas and Senior Associate Commissioner Grondine discussed the degrees that would be included in this program.

- VOTE

- Board of Early Education and Care Motion 2025-03 Approval of the Use of Funds for the New Early Education and Care Educator Scholarship Program approved unanimously

- Early Childhood Mental & Behavioral Health – Overview & Key Initiatives

Commissioner Kershaw discussed efforts to create a statewide strategy to address increased need for resources related to early childhood mental and behavioral health.

Secretary Tutwiler discussed the early education through higher education mental health framework to develop a shared language about the existing challenges, identify best practices, link sectors, and identify key performance indicators.

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Jocelyn Bowne-EEC Deputy Commissioner for Research, Innovation, and Supports, Sarah Vokenant-EEC Associate Commissioner, Program Innovation and Support, and Aimee Smith-Zeoli-EEC Special Education Support Specialist. Associate Commissioner Volkenant discussed EEC's commitment to supporting the workforce.

Ms. Smith-Zeoli discussed the impact of behavioral health and social emotional learning. Ms. Smith-Zeoli outlined current behavioral health challenges experienced in early education programs by children, families, and educators. She discussed the goals of mental and behavioral supports. Ms. Smith-Zeoli shared the current mental and behavioral resources and support offered by EEC and in partnership with other state agencies. Ms. Smith-Zeoli introduced the EEC Behavioral Health team. Ms. Smith-Zeoli discussed the support provided by the early

childhood mental health consultation grants and highlighted the programs that were awarded grants. Ms. Smith-Zeoli provided an overview of new initiatives for 2025.

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Maria Mossaides, Director of the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) and Audrey Smolkin, Executive Director for the Center of Child Wellbeing & Trauma to discuss the Strategic Trauma Responsive Early Education Training (STREET) Initiative in partnership with EEC. Director Mossaides discussed how the OCA partnered with EEC to support families and children dealing with trauma. Executive Director Smolkin provided an overview of the STREET Initiative and detailed the upcoming training opportunities for EEC staff and providers. Ms. Smith-Zeoli provided a timeline for the upcoming STREET training opportunities and discussed ongoing efforts and aspirations for the EEC behavioral health team. Board Member Sagor expressed support for the STREET trainings and initiatives. Director Mossaides emphasized that the initiatives are focused on supporting families and reducing inappropriate reports of abuse. Co-Chair Moeller and Board Member Kain commented on the importance of these initiatives for children's educational success. Chair Belsito commented that the partnership between EEC and various state agencies is vital to prioritizing the work.

- FY25 Mid-Year Review

Commissioner Kershaw provided an update on the status of the FY25 strategic initiatives, projects, and priorities related to family access, program stability, program quality, workforce support, and agency infrastructure. Commissioner Kershaw discussed the major topics for Board input and action in FY25. Board Member Kain commented on the amount of progress to date. Co-Chair Moeller and Board Member Ruiz commented on the need to continue to track accessibility and affordability. Board Member Price commented on the prioritization of the KPI Dashboard. Board Member Price and Chair Belsito observed that mental and behavioral health should be highlighted in the priorities.

Chair Belsito provided closing comments.

Meeting Adjourned 3:15PM