**Board of Early Education and Care**

**June 13, 2023**

**1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

**Department of Early Education and Care, Central Office**

**50 Milk Street, 5th Floor**

**Boston, MA 02110**

[https://www.youtube.com/c/EECMass](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https*3A*2F*2Furldefense.com*2Fv3*2F__https*3A*2Fwww.youtube.com*2Fc*2FEECMass__*3B!!CUhgQOZqV7M!mtJGkDA0V8yVgg2uKSG9uy90hzVOfMC6kxew8RLmPytYEKM5G63U2wNQX5lmit0oRma9LJJQvSy2Xg9khjIXdBkRMbjsJqM*24&data=05*7C01*7Cmike*40renvisioning.com*7Cfc2fcdfea44a4844760708da926316e2*7C804f5616b15149f0831435a91562ab97*7C0*7C0*7C637983251547746626*7CUnknown*7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0*3D*7C3000*7C*7C*7C&sdata=GfmZaBZpVTD29gjgCI6wqLvtPwwz9k3Ct84ytJS62uk*3D&reserved=0__;JSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUlJSUl!!CUhgQOZqV7M!nAONvpYnuUFeIIGmPyWAYzixbXXP4opicM2oKiaL2PxTSq3vmDXa1fDb49UwAzr-myowXZhp4oTO75KqUO9_ZCMBwQ$)

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

Dr. Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary of Education (via phone)

Amy Kershaw, Commissioner

Paul Belsito, Chairperson

Maria Gonzalez Moeller

George Atanasov

Carolyn Kain, J.D., Designee for HHS Secretary Kate Walsh

Linda D. Sagor, M.D., M.P.H

Jamella Lee

Cheryl Travers (via phone)

Mora Segal (via phone)

Stephanie Curenton, Ph.D. (listening via phone, but did not vote on pending matters)

**Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Not Present**

Nikki Ruiz de Luzuriaga

**AGENDA:**

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair**

Chairperson Belsito called the meeting to order and began by stating that June is the end of the agency’s fiscal year. He thanked the team for an impactful and productive year and stated he looks forward to the start of a new fiscal year with new goals and priorities that continue to meet the needs of children and families in the Commonwealth. Chairperson Belsito highlighted that the focus will continue to be stabilization and healing by utilizing innovation and strategic thinking to advance the field. He shared that today’s meeting will include a number of recaps and votes.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed the Board and thanked them for attending the last Board meeting for the fiscal year. Commissioner Kershaw stated that the Board will reconvene at a strategic retreat in August. She stated that the agenda today will focus on a recap of the year. Commissioner Kershaw provided personnel updates and highlighted employment opportunities at the agency. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the FY24 budget status and highlighted that the Governor’s budget includes a 25% increase over last fiscal year and both the House and Senate versions of the budget demonstrate a strong commitment to the agency. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update on the waiver related to the price limitation law and indicated that the Operational Services Division granted the waiver, which will allow the child care sector to continue to stabilize and heal. Commissioner Kershaw provided an update regarding the EEC pilot program that provides priority for financial assistance for early educators. Commissioner Kershaw highlighted the updates to the EEC website and invited feedback for further updates to ensure the website is an accessible entry point for users.

**Statements from the Public**

Chairperson Belsito confirmed that public comment was received via email and was distributed to the Board prior to the meeting.

**Routine Business:**

* Approval of Minutes from May 9, 2023 Meeting – VOTE
  + Approved after unanimous vote with Board member Travers abstaining
* Approval of Board Meeting Dates for FY24 – VOTE
  + Chairperson Belsito noted that the Board meetings will move to the second Wednesday of every month.
  + Approved after unanimous vote

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

* Promoting High Quality Early Education and Care – Theory of Action

Commissioner Kershaw welcomed Deputy Commissioner for Research, Innovation, and Support Jocelyn Bowne. Commissioner Kershaw stated the primary purpose of today’s discussion will be to discuss the agency’s theory of action related to quality programming. Commissioner Kershaw discussed FY23 accomplishments and priority initiatives. She highlighted reforms to childcare financial assistance. She shared that the goal through FY24 is to increase the number of families receiving childcare financial assistance to the 2019 level of 58,000 and discussed efforts to modernize communications to families on the waitlist, which include a pilot text campaign.

Commissioner Kershaw highlighted the historic rate increase in FY23 and the cost-informed rate increase study which will bring an equity lens to discussions surrounding rates and costs. She highlighted work accomplished to stabilize and support program operations. Commissioner Kershaw reported that licensed slots have increased to 230,000 in FY23, up from 221,000 in FY22. Commissioner Kershaw discussed work focused on building career pathways and pipelines. Commissioner Kershaw discussed updates to modernize EEC operations and highlighted that a Board working group is meeting over the summer to discuss key performance indicators to develop an operational dashboard that will be available to the public. Commissioner Kershaw shared that today’s discussion will begin to outline how the agency can build infrastructure to support quality programs built from licensing standards with a mindset of continuous quality improvement.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed research evidence that supports investments in quality early education. Deputy Commissioner Bowne defined high quality learning and care environments and discussed tools the agency can utilize to track and measure success and how that information can be used to support programs and children. Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed the interconnected efforts to support continuous quality improvement for programs while building professional opportunities and career pathways for educators, including a new credentialing system for educators, increased access to higher education and a robust pipeline. Chairperson Belsito reflected that it is exciting to be focused on building quality.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed the categories of quality practices for programs and program leaders and highlighted that the work will center on diversity, equity and inclusion. Deputy Commissioner Bowne shared a video that illustrates a quality program in action.

Board member Segal suggested that a further discussion would be helpful to determine a focusing goal and inquired what actions could be taken to connect the longitudinal data work being undertaken by multiple agencies. Board member Segal encouraged the Board to set a goal to anchor the logic model and theory of action. Commissioner Kershaw stated that Board member Segal’s comments will be added to the agenda for the Board retreat in August.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed skill standards for adult/child interactions and how educators and program leaders can support and model positive interactions and she stressed the importance of recognizing and valuing linguistic and cultural differences.

Board member Lee inquired why the terms social and emotional learning are not explicitly included in the slides since that is the focus of the research and the discussion. Deputy Commissioner Bowne acknowledged that today’s presentation focused on the practices that would be seen in the classroom and the outcome of those practices would be social and emotional learning, along with literacy development and those practices are more integrated in an early learning environment.

Commissioner Kershaw stated that Board member Curenton is having difficulty with audio but will have a question related to intentions to measure quality.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed standards for curriculum and assessment, highlighting that curriculum should include a broad range of goals and reflective of the children’s culture, experience, and language. Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed the importance of the physical environment and stated that EEC licensing regulations provide a strong foundation for this aspect of development.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed family engagement and the importance of consistent and supportive collaboration between home and school. She emphasized the importance of development screenings and outlined how educators and program leaders can support family engagement. Deputy Commissioner Bowne highlighted leadership roles and business practices.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne responded to Board member Curenton’s earlier question regarding what would be used to measure quality by stating that standardized observation tools currently exist and going forward it will be important to identify the correct tool to support programs for their current needs while building a consistent statewide quality standards.

Board member Moeller commented that many of the practices discussed could be impacted by staffing issues. Commissioner Kershaw recognized that it is important to agree on the domains and building infrastructure to support and align resources while continuing to focus on workforce recruitment and retention.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed the different types of supports needed by FCC, GSA and out of school time programs. She discussed the current systems in place to support programs and educators.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed next steps to continue the data-informed system development, noting that the Quality Rating Improvement System has been paused but the goal is to continue the drive for ongoing, continuous quality improvement within programs. Commissioner Kershaw noted that engagement with stakeholders will begin in the fall to review and revise the childcare licensing regulations. Deputy Commissioner Bowne highlighted that an early literacy working group is being launched with DESE to ensure alignment across systems and to create essential foundational skills. Deputy Commissioner Bowne stated that federal preschool development grant funds will be utilized to accelerate the credentialing development work. She discussed efforts being taken to integrate information and data into EEC internal data systems. Chairperson Belsito acknowledged the hard work of the team and thanked Secretary Tutwiler for his support in facilitating conversations with our partners with DESE.

Board member Sagor asked about the benefit of developing a ratings system and Deputy Commissioner Bowne highlighted that the goal is continuous quality improvement with clear goals and incentives and a ratings system runs the risk of becoming a compliance system. Board member Segal commented that it is important to learn from past experiences and expressed excitement to create a system that supports improvement and stressed that it is important to set benchmarks.

Board member Atanasov inquired if outdoor environment is considered when determining quality and Deputy Commissioner Bowne stated that the critical component is for programs to consider how to provide opportunities for children’s development. Board member Atanasov inquired if there was any pipeline for professional development for adolescents who work at out of school time programs. Deputy Commissioner Bowne acknowledged this was a great opportunity to develop professional learning opportunities and build a pipeline. Commissioner Kershaw noted this is an opportunity for engagement with higher education.

Board member Sagor expressed interest the area of family engagement and looked forward to engaging on that topic going forward. Chairperson Belsito thanked Deputy Commissioner Bowne and her team for the presentation and expressed appreciation for the continuous improvement mindset. Commissioner Kershaw noted that EEC has been building a continuous improvement mindset and partnership with the field is a natural extension of that work.

* **Child Care Financial Assistance Parent Fee Scale – Overview and VOTE**

Commissioner Kershaw introduced Deputy Commissioner Bowne to provide information on the parent fee scale and recent changes made in 2021 and Deputy Commissioner for Family Access and Engagement Tyreese Nicolas to discuss the family perspective. Commissioner Kershaw stated that within six months of an agency completing a market rate survey, the Board is required to take action on the parent fee scale and today the Board was being asked to reaffirm the existing approach.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne provided an overview of parent fees and stated that, in June 2021, the Board approved a new fee scale. Deputy Commissioner Bowne explained the overall structure of the fee scale and highlighted that one of the approved changes removed the fee for families with income less than the Federal poverty threshold. She detailed the exemptions and discounts that are available to eligible families and highlighted that while fees can be adjusted at reassessment, they cannot be increased within the 12-month authorization period, per federal CCDBG guidelines. Deputy Commissioner Bowne stated that most families pay a fee that is at or less than 7% of their income and overall.

Deputy Commissioner Nicolas described the journey for income eligible families through the financial assistance system. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas provided an update on the text messaging pilot program, stating that it has been successful assisting parents through the application process for financial assistance. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas provided an example of how a family’s income is assessed and a fee is applied.

Commissioner Kershaw asked the Board to reaffirm the existing parent fee scale by voting to approve EEC’s current approach.

Board member Atanasov asked where the fee goes, and Commissioner Kershaw stated the program receives the fee and EEC adjusts payments to the program based on the parent fee. There was discussion on the administrative burden to programs.

Board member Sagor inquired about the process for the text message pilot and Deputy Commissioner Nicolas explained the two waitlist initiatives which include the text message pilot which notifies and reminds parents when they are eligible for funding and placement and the financial assistance case tracking, which is being assisted by Mass 211 who do outreach to parents to update their status and gather accurate data. Deputy Commissioner Nicolas stated the case tracking project was launched last week with 2,900 texts sent out and 921 responses received, resulting in updates for 800 families. There was discussion regarding the goals of the waitlist initiatives.

Board member Moeller inquired if the extension on the parent fees were federal or state regulations and Commissioner Kershaw explained it was a combination and provided examples of each.

Vote to reaffirm parent fee scale that was approved in 2021 and authorizes continued use.

Approved unanimously.

* **Updating Board By-Laws – Overview and VOTE**

Commissioner Kershaw recognized the need to modernize the Board by-laws. General Counsel Janis DiLoreto Smith provided a history of the Board by-laws and outlined the proposed updates needed to reflect current practices and procedures. General Counsel DiLoreto Smith noted that a citation had been added in Article 1, Organization and Function of the Board, that addresses how Board members are appointed. She then discussed the key updates to the by-laws. There was discussion regarding permissible reasons for remote participation and Board member Kain proposed striking the language starting at “provided” to “outside of Massachusetts on the scheduled meeting date” on the last clause.

Approved unanimously with the edit proposed.

* **Nomination and Election of Vice-Chairperson – VOTE**

Chairperson Belsito moved to nominate Board member Maria Moeller as Vice-Chairperson of the Board.

Approved unanimously.

Chairperson Belsito provided closing remarks.

Meeting adjourned at 3PM