**Board of Early Education and Care**

**June 21, 2022**

**1:30 PM – 4:30 PM**

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

**100 Myles Standish Boulevard, Suite 100**

**Taunton, MA 02780**

**NOTE: This meeting will be broadcasted over EEC’s YouTube Channel:** <https://youtu.be/tsnMPmtah8o>

Members of the Board of Early Education and Care Present

Nonie Lesaux, Chairperson

Jim Peyser, Secretary of Education

Amy Kershaw, Acting Commissioner

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

Joni Block

Paul Belsito

Jamella Lee (via phone)

Mora Segal

David Cruise (via phone)

**The meeting was called to order at 1:30 PM.**

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair**

Chairperson Lesaux welcomed the Board to the in-person meeting at the Taunton office. Chairperson Lesaux provided an overview of the agenda.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Peyser provided a budget update and stated that the FY23 budget is currently in conference. Secretary Peyser discussed the Governor’s supplemental budget that includes a $10M innovation fund under the control of EEC designed to support new models related to the future of work and a $45M down payment assistance fund which is expanded off an existing program with Mass Housing and is designed to specifically include and prioritize family child care providers seeking to open or expand a child care program.

**Comments from the Commissioner**

Acting Commissioner Kershaw thanked the EEC staff in the Taunton office for their hospitality hosting the Board meeting. Acting Commissioner Kershaw provided an update to the COVID policy and highlighted that EEC is working closely with DPH to share information with providers and families regarding the recent approval of the vaccine for younger children.

Acting Commissioner Kershaw provided an update about the child care subsidy system and shared that, through approval from the Operational Services Division of the Comptroller’s Office, interim contracts for providers and child care resource and referral agencies have been approved for 18 months and 12 months respectively. EEC will begin the re-procurement process for these contracts. Acting Commissioner Kershaw shared that approval was granted for a third year for the price limitation waiver which allows providers to accept rate increases without increasing rate to private pay families.

**Statements from the Public**

Chairperson Lesaux stated that one written public comment regarding the location of fingerprinting was received and invited public comment. There was no further public comment.

**Routine Business:**

* Approval of Minutes from May 10, 2022 Meeting – Approved
* Approval of Board Meeting Dates for FY23 – Approved

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

Acting Commissioner Kershaw shared that today’s agenda and discussion will be grounded in the pillars of the strategic action plan. Acting Commissioner Kershaw highlighted that $380.3M has been distributed to programs through the C3 program, including $14M in workforce bonus funds.

* Program & Educator Support
  + Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3): April Survey Findings

Deputy Commissioner for Research, Innovation, and Supports Jocelyn Bowne and Director of Data Analytics Adrienne Murphy shared an overview of the C3 data received from the April survey, as well as key takeaways. Ms. Murphy highlighted data collected pertaining to enrollment and spending. Acting Commissioner Kershaw highlighted that as enrollment increases, spending is shifting into new investments. Deputy Commissioner Bowne reflected that there is an integrated interest in investing in family child care programs and family child care providers. Board member Segal inquired if there were any surprises found in the data. Deputy Commissioner Bowne commented that the shifts in spending reflects a freedom to invest in the business and the field is moving in the right direction. Board member Block inquired about staff retention and commented that quality care is tied to retention. Ms. Murphy shared that the survey asked about staff openings but not about retention. Acting Commissioner Kershaw affirmed that programs are continuing to struggle with staffing issues.

Ms. Murphy shared information gathered in the C3 survey pertaining to educator data. Ms. Murphy highlighted that 51% of programs reported investing in increased salaries since July 2021.

Board member Block inquired if there was any information regarding sustaining the salary increases over time. Ms. Murphy shared that that question was not asked specifically in the survey and Acting Commissioner Kershaw acknowledged that programs have provided questions and comments about the sustainability of the funding.

Ms. Murphy discussed data regarding continuing staffing challenges and programs’ continued difficulty to serve their full licensed capacity due to unfilled staff openings.

There was discussion regarding historical staffing data and discussion regarding the data set.

Ms. Murphy discussed data regarding programs who participate in the subsidy program and barriers to expanding subsidies. Acting Commissioner Kershaw highlighted the relationship dynamic between staffing capacity, licensed capacity and programs’ ability to accept subsidized children.

There was discussion about the data gathered from the 35% of programs who do not currently accept subsidies and the barriers they reported to entering the subsidy system.

Ms. Murphy discussed providers’ concerns about the future of C3 grants and changes programs reported that they would need to make without C3 funding which demonstrates the continued reliance on the funding. Secretary Peyser commented that all the concerns reported by providers would reduce capacity and have huge implications. Chairperson Lesaux stressed that the early education system is still currently affected by COVID due to low vaccination rates and the information needs to be viewed along with COVID support.

Board member Belsito commented that this data highlights the need for continued funding.

There was discussion regarding the public private partnership between the State and programs.

* + Education Qualifications, Credentialing & Minimum Hiring Requirements

Deputy Commissioner Bowne discussed long term goals to work with partners to develop a career pathway and credentials and and short-term goals to take immediate steps to address the urgent workforce crisis with support for educators and programs.

Deputy Commissioner Bowne reviewed the levers available to build the workforce system, as well as the overall structure of the credential as designed. Chairperson Lesaux raised a point for later discussion regarding measuring competency rather than years of experience. Acting Commissioner Kershaw shared that EEC is working with the Department of Higher Education to engage with community colleges through funding and directly with college presidents to confer credits for prior learning. Chairperson Lesaux stated that core competencies need to be defined and measured in a way that is reliable and consistent and mapped to child outcomes. Board member Segal inquired about the timeline to operationalize the workforce pathways. Deputy Commissioner Bowne stated that the verification process is needed to structure the credential and is the focus of the work. There was discussion regarding priorities and milestones and Acting Commissioner Kershaw stated that building a framework for a career pathways system is the catalyst for dealing with the workforce crisis. Deputy Commissioner Bowne provided an overview of current regulations pertaining to educator qualifications and also shared feedback regarding temporary policies and procedures. Deputy Commissioner Bowne highlighted necessary next steps in the immediate, as well as long term through FY23. Board member Segal inquired about potential barriers to organization and implementation. Deputy Commissioner Bowne and Acting Commissioner Kershaw discussed capacity issues and the need to align with higher education. Chairperson Lesaux discussed the need for a meaningful workforce pathway and recruitment efforts. There was discussion surrounding improving wages and conditions for the workforce.

Chairperson Lesaux acknowledged Board member Joni Block’s years of service and dedication to the Board and the early education and care field.

Break until 2:25PM

* Family Access
  + Financial Assistance for Child Care (Subsidy)

Acting Commissioner Kershaw provided an overview of the ongoing project to undertake an end-to-end review of the subsidy system. She shared subsidy caseload trends and discussed barriers families face when accessing subsidies. Acting Commissioner Kershaw shared that EEC has funding to support a return to pre-COVID levels of families accessing financial assistance.

Director of Policy Development Joy Cohen and Michael Kelleher from the Governor’s Strategic Innovation Group provided an overview of the process for the subsidy system review project. Mr. Kelleher stated that the intent of the review is to meet the needs of families through the development of EEC policy, procedures, and process while applying federal and state regulations, reporting rules, and financial requirements. Mr. Kelleher emphasized that this process is ongoing and constant.

Ms. Cohen shared the areas of focus when reviewing the subsidy system, and highlighted efforts to expedite the application process for families. Acting Commissioner Kershaw acknowledged that the current EEC subsidy system is challenging for families to navigate and there are ample opportunities to simplify the process with a focus on families.

Mr. Kelleher discussed next steps including efforts to remove barriers in the application process, revisions to policy, and contract procurement.

Board member Segal inquired about goals for waitlist timelines and Acting Commissioner Kershaw stated that the goal is for families to be able to find a childcare spot as soon as they are deemed eligible and timelines should be driven by the families. There was discussion regarding waitlist reconciliation efforts and Acting Commissioner Kershaw stated that due to the waitlist reconciliation efforts, by September there should be an increase in enrollment, as well as a data regarding needs of families on the waitlist.

* + - Proposed Regulation Change: *Continuation of Subsidized Child Care Services Pending Request for Review* – Vote

Acting Commissioner Kershaw stated that current EEC regulations and policy do not provide consistency or stability for families during the appeal process. General Counsel Janis DiLoreto Smith discussed EEC’s proposed efforts to streamline the review and hearing process for families by increasing availability of continued subsidized care during the review and hearing process, making the process less complex, and eliminating redundancies. Chairperson Lesaux moved to approve the proposed amendments and authorize the Acting Commissioner to solicit public comment.

**Vote - Approved unanimously**

Board member Block stressed that it will be important to reach out for public comment in multiple ways. General Counsel DiLoreto Smith stated that any public comment received will be shared with the Board.

Meeting adjourned to Executive Session at 4:00PM. Prior to adjournment, Chairperson Lesaux noted that the open meeting would not reconvene following Executive Session.