

**Board of Early Education and Care**

**Tuesday, May 11, 2021**

**1 PM – 3 PM**

**Department of Early Education and Care**

**This meeting was livestreamed to EEC's Facebook page: Department of Early Education and Care**

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**MINUTES**

**\*EEC RECORDED THIS BOARD MEETING; THEREFORE, THE MINUTES CONSTITUTE A SUMMARY OF THE BOARD ACTIVITY. \***

**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

David Cruise

Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Ph.D.

Joni Block

Joan Wasser Gish

Alison Schonwald, M.D.

Nicki Ruiz de Luzuriaga

Sheila Balboni

**The meeting was called to order at 1:02 P.M.**

Chairperson Lesaux: Thank you everyone for being here. The Commissioner continues to build her team, and we spent time on her evaluation, and we will revisit it in June to bring it into alignment with the Fiscal Year. The Commissioner is going to fill us in on some great progress and goals looking ahead.

Secretary Peyser: It is useful to have this synchronization of our work on strategy. A couple of updates: students in grades K-8 are all able to attend school full time; this will be extended to high school students next week. Last week, the governor announced more than \$70M for summer learning initiatives. Other initiatives include in person summer schools (supports for kids with special needs), enriched support for mental health services, partnerships with certain summer camps, hands-on math

camps, access to no-cost college courses for high school students, and others. MA is #1 among larger states for vaccination rate per capita. We are not at the finish line yet but we are making great progress.

Chairperson Lesaux: Looks like a much better landscape for academic year 21-22. Commissioner, off to you!

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: I am excited to delve into updates around processes we've launched and the strategic plan moving forward. I will give updates on EEC's investments through the Summer. We continue to have testing sites available for all programs even with vaccinations. We will keep these available through the Summer to ensure safety. We will reassess in the Fall based on which resources are most needed. We will continue supporting providers with PPE. We are moving back into in-person services and we will continue to provide updated guidance and support on visitors, parent visits, etc. We are marching towards normalcy and we will continue to update not only childcare providers, but those providing professional development, CDA reviews, accreditation, and other activities that happen in person. There is still a need for good safety practices, but it is critical to have these in-person services return as soon as possible. As school districts return to in-person learning, we will continue ensuring our providers will have access to full-day subsidies through the end of the year.

Chairperson Lesaux: Makes motion to approve the Minutes from the April 13, 2021 Board Meeting.

**Motion is seconded and passes unanimously.**

#### AGENDA ITEMS

1. Department Updates
  - a. Summer Step Up
    - i. Prepare young learners for school
      1. Focus on transition pre-k through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade
      2. Prioritizing those with limited experience in public schools
    - ii. Build summer learning experiences
      1. Create, extend, or enhance in-person summer learning for children whose access was limited due to pandemic impacts
    - iii. Support schools and partners in summer programs
      1. Nurture collaboration between districts, schools, and community-based partners
    - iv. Partner with local and national experts
      1. Disseminate tailored materials aligned to school preparedness efforts by schools and community partners
    - v. Invest in Infrastructure

Board Member Kain: I am seeing this is aligned with the initiatives the Secretary commented on at the beginning of the meeting. I am wondering how workforce issues are going to be addressed. School districts are struggling to staff summer programs.

Secretary Peyser: We are studying this closely. We may need to take other remedial steps if it turns out that we don't have enough educators to fill the spots. This may help: we are trying to ensure there is a balance between academics and recreational activity. We want it to be more manageable and enjoyable for the educators.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: I do understand this is a huge issue for EEC. Our hope is to be able to support with community-specific consultation to find creative strategies for this. We want to have a palatable initiative for teachers/providers to take on in the Summer.

Board Member Balboni: In terms of burnout, we have to pay attention to flexibility around payment, and reimbursement for early education staff.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: We will talk about that in terms of the grant updates later in the meeting. Some of those strategies will address this issue.

Board Member Block: This ties into comments we made last month in introducing this program, and it's exciting to see it roll out. I am thinking about how this aligns with the EOE pre-k through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade remote learning grant, because a lot of it is the same initiative in terms of integrating public school staff and community-based organizations. It will be interesting to see how communities utilize, without supplanting, some of their existing programs like extended-day, summer learning, 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, as well as enhance the CFCE ongoing initiatives to help with transitions. We can learn a lot from this.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: Our perspective We are hoping to learn what kind of infrastructure to enhance and invest in. Every community and its collaborators are unique, so individualized support will be critical.

Board Member Balboni: I suggest we document the progress and successes of this program to use in the future.

b. Grants Rollout

i. FY21 Operational Grants: Progress

1. 6 applications approved
  - a. Approval to dollars being given to providers should take 2-3 weeks
2. 1647 (28%) applications completed and being reviewed by PCG
  - a. 34% of all eligible FCC providers
  - b. 10% of eligible child care centers
3. 993 (17%) providers have started an application but not completed
  - a. 15% of all FCC providers
  - b. 24% of all eligible child care centers
4. 353 calls have been answered by PCG
5. 448 emails have been received, 98% have been answered by PCG

Board Member Wasser Gish: On one hand, PCG has been a good example of how the Commissioner has been smart in harnessing capacity and expertise that can be leveraged to further EEC's work. At the same time, it shows that we don't have sufficient internal capacity to do the work demanded of the agency. I hope when there is an opportunity for some pause, we can think deeply about implications for long term operational capacity within the agency.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: We are being thoughtful about what kinds of capacity we need to bring in. I am excited for the next meeting to reflect on what this means for sustainability.

Regulation Progress Updates

1. Need to validate educator progress
  - a. Separating provider/center from individual educator to help them gain credentials

Strategic Action Plan: Family Access Planning

- c. Parent Fee
  - i. Timeline
    1. Feb 9: Vote to approve parent fee chart subject to public comment
    2. Mar 1: public hearings to collect feedback on Parent Fee Model
    3. Apr 13: Board Update on Parent Fee Model Implementation and Feedback
    4. May 13: Board Discussion – parent fee public comment period closing
    5. May 28: Parent fee comment period ends
    6. Jun 17: Final Board vote on Parent Fee model
- d. 3si Progress Report
  - i. Partial analysis complete
  - ii. Analysis to date
    1. Analyzed state population data and EEC subsidy data to identify gaps in the utilization of subsidy-based financial assistance among children aged 0-12 years from needy families in MA in the 26-month period from Jan 2019 through Feb 2021
  - iii. Observations
    1. Pre-COVID
      - a. Even at their peak utilization levels in June 2019, MA child care subsidies only served a portion of eligible children in the state due to capacity and access limitations
    2. Since COVID
      - a. The number of children served has declined significantly since June 2020, in part due to a large caseload fluctuation for school-age children
  - iv. Subsidy Caseload Trends by Age: Jan 2019- Feb 2021
    1. Jan 19- Jun 19: Total children served increased slightly, primarily due to a cyclical increase in school-age subsidies
    2. Jun 19- Feb 21: Total children served decreased significantly across all age groups
  - v. Subsidy Caseload Trends by Region: Jan 2019- Feb 2021
    1. Jan 19- Jun 19: Total children served increased slightly in all regions, with the largest percentage increase (10%) occurring in Western MA.
    2. Jun 19- Feb 21: Total children served decreased significantly, with the largest percentage declines during this period occurring in Metro Boston and Western MA.
  - vi. Subsidy Caseload Trends by Agency: Jan 2019- Feb 2021
    1. Jan 19- Jun 19: Total children served by all agencies increased in this period, with the largest increase occurring in DCF subsidies and the smallest increase in the IE subsidies

2. Jun 19- Feb 21: Total children served by all agencies decreased significantly. IE subsidies had the largest decrease in volume and DTA subsidies had the largest percentage decrease.

Board Member Balboni: Given the fact that there was a one-time occurrence with COVID and the pandemic, what are we using this analysis for? These trends may not replicate.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: It tells us a few things. It shows our pre-COVID peak. In the FY21 data, we see our new starting place, and understand where we are today. As we see uptick in utilization, we want to compare it to pre-COVID levels. Work is going to look differently and family needs will evolve, so understanding where we are is essential.

Board Member Ruiz de Luzuriaga: As we look to increase the number of families served, often times families are overwhelmed by the complexity of applying for child care subsidies, and they sometimes need help from a social worker or someone with a law degree just to help. We want to simplify things for families.

Board Member Wasser Gish: I would love to see us use some of these tools in order to benchmark ways toward recovery. We want to understand the ways in which some of these trends are impacted beyond the EEC system: COVID, patterns of COVID, changes in the labor market, etc. It gives us the opportunity to be attuned to the effects of policy decisions.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: It will be so helpful to have these benchmarks. Not having a reliable benchmark in the past was a real barrier to understanding and planning for the future.

e. Deep Dive: Subsidy Regulations

i. Using Subsidy Policy to Address Family Needs

1. Series of issues to solve
  - a. Expand access to early education and care programs by providing tuition relief to priority populations
  - b. Address the gap between number of working families with young children and the enrollment within the current system
  - c. Simplify operational processes to ensure efficient operations and streamlined processes, including the waitlist
2. Principles proposed
  - a. Ensure policies target prioritized populations
  - b. Incentivize providers to accept more subsidized children
  - c. Streamline administrative requirements to reduce barriers for families
3. Current pain points
  - a. Narrow and rigid eligibility requirements
  - b. Gap between number of families with young children, and capacity within current system
  - c. Complicated process for families seeking subsidies
  - d. Isolated child care subsidy processes do not integrate with other Commonwealth-funded services
4. Strategies to address

- a. Use data to prioritize key populations
  - b. Improve waitlist process
  - c. Create flexible contract structures
  - d. Simplify eligibility processes
- 5. Mechanisms
  - a. Regulations
  - b. Policy/Guidance
  - c. IT Systems
  - d. Contracted Supports
    - i. Rebid
      - 1. Contracted providers
      - 2. CCR&Rs
      - 3. FCC Systems
        - a. Define key supports needed by FCC
        - b. Clarify expectations, including how services are delivered and by whom

Board Member Wasser Gish: This is spot on. However, I don't want this focus on process improvements to take away from the fact that we will need to have State funds with greater flexibility. I want this to be part of the conversation.

Board Member Ruiz de Luzuriaga: There is no reason to have a waitlist if there is capacity, so I am very glad we are addressing this.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: I appreciate that being brought up. I don't have a perfect solution yet, but it is high priority for us. We want our rebid to help minimize bureaucratic delay. We want families to navigate the system easily.

Chairperson Lesaux: Part of effective reopening and moving the State ahead is to support women who have been hit very hard. This has always been a pain point.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy: We will move our Caseload update to the June meeting.

Chairperson Lesaux: The use of data continues to drive the conversations we have at the Board. I really appreciate these conversations.

**Meeting is adjourned at 2:53 PM.**