**To: Members, MA Board of Early Education and Care**

**From: Nonie K. Lesaux, Chair**

**Re: November Public Meeting (11/9)**

**Date: November 5, 2021**

I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday afternoon for our next meeting of the Board. The plan for the meeting is a departure from a regular set of agenda items, to go deeper on our workforce discussions which have been ongoing since the strategic plan process and through the pandemic, but most recently at our August retreat and at our September meeting when we heard from the Commissioner on the plans for the educator credential work that is underway.

**Tuesday’s Plan**

We will start with our regular items in brief—some remarks from the Secretary and Commissioner (including an update on the budget process), the approval of October minutes, a status update on the ARPA grants just as we’ve received in prior months, and a brief update on the educator credential work. From there, we will welcome some guests to the meeting and pivot to what I am thinking of as a strategic, roundtable discussion, “**Workforce Innovations with a Competency-Based Focus.**” During this roundtable, we will hear from a slate of speakers who are connected to workforce innovations and solutions from a number of lenses and with ties to several sectors, each with a strong commitment to impact.

**Context for the Roundtable Discussion**

As previously discussed, we are a critical juncture in our work and partnership with the agency as it relates to workforce development. The last 18 months have exposed the sector’s critical and essential role in working families’ lives, the economy and society. At the same time, the need for innovative, high-impact strategies to both recruit and retain a talented, well-supported workforce has never been more pressing.

We face an educator shortage—according to a survey conducted by NAEYC, four out of five child care programs reported staff shortages this summer[[1]](#footnote-1)—and our current educators are those who worked tirelessly to support children and families through the pandemic. At the same time, we are on the brink of unprecedented federal investments, and the last decade of social impact work has underscored the importance of 1) scalable, person-centered solutions to meet learners and workers where they are; and 2) the role of public-private partnerships to expand capacity and accelerate progress. Building from the first key lesson (scalable, person-centered solutions), I am also mindful that in the early education domain, we especially want to place equity at the core of our work; we need to mount learning opportunities and career growth strategies and systems that are accessible and that recognize and leverage the linguistic, cultural and racial-ethnic diversity inherent in our dedicated, resilient workforce across the mixed-delivery system. In other words, it is pressing to design and articulate for all parties (the aspiring educator, the educator, and the employer) multiple entry points and pathways into and through a profession that is organized around skills and competencies and their progression to cultivate key practices and expertise. As a departure from doing “more of the same” and consistent with the systems-building goals reflected in the Strategic Plan and our collaborative work with the Commissioner and her team, in support of the field, we have an opportunity to drive the innovation and systems-building that we have aspired to for decades.

**Organization of the Roundtable Discussion**

Big picture, two questions motivated the organization of the roundtable and that may support your engagement with the panelists on Tuesday as well as our collective thinking going forward:

* As EEC considers its emerging credential – what can we learn from other sectors about how training, education, and intentional work experiences build, demonstrate, and document competencies?​
* Where can we translate promising concepts into scalable, systematized approaches?

As you will see below, the roundtable will follow a progression from the critical, big picture issues through to a case example and through to commentary from a national expert in workforce solutions. The case example centers on a public-private partnership between Pragya Systems[[2]](#footnote-2) and the Connecticut Capital Workforce Partnership, supported by XPrize, to mount competency-based training—online, self-paced learning with wrap-around instructional and career coaching supports, including support during the initial months on the job, offered by partners—for entry-level certification in a number of roles, e.g., medical assistant, direct support care worker. Their work included converting traditional curricula to competency-based learning experiences, which is of particular interest.

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| Workforce Innovations with a Competency-Based Focus |
| 2:00 p.m. | **Introduction + Framing****Overview and Critical Issues*** + **Nonie K. Lesaux, Chair, MA Board of Early Education and Care**

**Today’s “*Both-And*” Scenario: Work Experience and Education Pathways for a Comprehensive Workforce System*** + **Bob LePage, Assistant Secretary for Career Education**

**Capturing and Cultivating Talent among the Next Generation: The Role of High Schools and Post-Graduation Career Pathways in Early Adulthood*** + **Sam Intrator, Professor & Chair, Education and Child Study Program and Directing Co-Founder, Project Coach, Smith College**
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| 2:30 p.m. | **Case Example Presentation*** **Public-Private Partnership: Pragya Systems – Connecticut Capital Workforce Partners**
	+ **Ramji Rhagaven, CEO, Pragya Systems**
	+ **Ashish Cowlagi, VP, Pragya Systems + Lead on CT Project**
	+ **Alex Johnson, President + CEO, Connecticut Capital Workforce Partners**
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| 3:00 p.m. | **Looking Ahead: Key Lessons, Insights, and Innovations for Systems-Building Workforce Solutions*** **Kelly Aiken, Consultant**

 **Formerly Chief Program Officer, National Fund for Workforce Solutions** |
| 3:15 p.m. | **Q + A, Board Discussion** |

**Connections to Today’s Work and Priorities**

To be sure, it’s important to highlight that Tuesday’s discussion sits in the context of and builds from EEC’s current work to support and retain educators (wages, staffing, piloting business support for mgmt. and organizational practices, etc.) and the work to increase access to higher education and strengthen the pipeline through the education-focused pathway. We have, indeed, heard from the Commissioner over the past many months on these important efforts day-to-day. On Tuesday, in addition to hearing from Asst. Secretary LePage on the topic of credentialing and workforce innovations, we will also hear from him about some of the current strategies being implemented in the Commonwealth to support pandemic recovery efforts and address workforce shortages. Ultimately, we operate from the assumption that our workforce strategy is necessarily going to be comprehensive and multi-pronged; there is no one lever to pull, and all institutions and have a role to play in our success as a state.

**A Closing Note and a Warm Welcome!**

I look forward to what I hope will be a dynamic meeting and an opportunity to advance our summer and early fall conversations and our strategic work as a Board, in collaboration with the agency. We expect to continue with this format next month, with another strategic roundtable related to this one but with a specific focus on the role of business in innovations.

Finally, very best wishes to board member Nicki Ruiz de Luzuriaga on the arrival of baby Felix last month!

See you soon.

1. [naeyc\_july\_2021\_survey\_progressperil\_final.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/blog/naeyc_july_2021_survey_progressperil_final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. in its early inception, Pragya focused on taking degree holders and supporting them through a skills + competencies career pathway approach (solving for the widespread challenge of bridging college to career). However, they recently shifted gears to the non-degree, entry-level space given that’s where they see the greatest need; this was the focus of the project and partnership with the CT workforce board that we will hear about Tuesday. FYI that this focus on entry-level training and on partnerships does not come through on their website. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)