

Submitted Written Public Comment for November 10, 2020 Board of Early  
Education and Care Board Meeting

**Lydia Magliozzi Icke**

**Melora Myslik Balson**

**Commonwealth Children's Fund**

Chair Lesaux and Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy -

As you are acutely aware, the challenges facing Massachusetts child care providers today are greater than ever. Programs are incurring added expenses for health and safety, having a hard time finding staff, and operating at reduced enrollment as families struggle to get comfortable sending their children back to care. **It has become clear that access to comprehensive COVID testing has emerged as a crucial tool that would help to mitigate these challenges.**

We are participating in multiple conversations each week with early education leaders in the public, philanthropic and provider communities, and all are trying to find an actionable plan for comprehensive testing for the adults in the early education and care sector. As Governor Baker focuses on reopening guidelines for K-12 schools in Massachusetts, **it is very clear to us that early childhood providers must be included in these conversations as well, and that a comprehensive, state-wide surveillance COVID testing plan for child care providers must be developed and implemented quickly.**

At this juncture, what is most needed is urgent action to support the indispensable child care providers who are allowing the Commonwealth to get back to work, and to ensure their viability on the other end of this crisis.

Thank you for your support of this critical field, and for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Lydia Magliozzi Icke

Melora Myslik Balson

**Ben Hires**

**Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC)**

Dear Dr. Lesaux,

I hope this finds you well. I'm writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the MA Early Education and Care board. Thank you for the service you and your fellow directors provide EEC, the Commonwealth, and our sector.

I joined BCNC in June as CEO. In July, we opened our early childhood program and full day summer program after our team worked very hard to meet all of EEC and the public health guidelines in a short amount of time. Proudly, we have not had any cases of COVID19 to date and our staff have worked tirelessly to keep everyone safe. The staffing and the organization have undertaken a lot including

additional expenses for additional staff, PPE, extra cleaning, additional desks, chairs, and materials for individualized learning.

We are currently at 60% capacity in terms of enrollment and therefore running a \$20,000 deficit each month. We hope to increase our enrollment in our childcare program to make our program sustainable but we face challenges hiring and retaining teachers due to their and their families' health concerns and challenges enrolling families due to their health concerns. Families have also lost employment and therefore keeping their children home.

Right now having EEC continue covering the parent fee and fully reimbursing organizations enrolled children in-person or virtually is critical to not only families but our mitigating current losses and allowing us to find a way to sustain operations. With rising COVID cases across our community, we also hope EEC can coordinate access to free and regular COVID testing as their safety is front of mind of our staff.

We know that Governor Baker, our legislators, the EEC Department, and you will be working hard to support the early childhood sector as this year's state budget is finalized. We will continue to advocate and share with elected officials and others on how organizations like BCNC are doing and what will best help us get through this difficult time.

Thank you very much for listening and supporting our field. Please share with your colleagues and/or please let me know who else would value hearing from organizations on the front lines.

Sincerely,  
Ben Hires

**Brett Westbrook**  
**Berkshire County Head Start**  
Hello,

On behalf of programs open and serving children in person, I would like to inquire about the funding structure for programs. Currently, we have only been able to serve at a reduced capacity due to the rise in COVID cases in our area. While we have the flexibility from EEC to serve at pre COVID capacity, the fact of the matter is that we are still in a pandemic which prevents us from doing so. Programs are losing money everyday and will not be able to maintain with the current funding structure.

My hope is that this matter will be discussed with the intent to work toward solutions to support programs in sustaining during this time.

Thank you,  
Brett Westbrook  
Executive Director  
Berkshire County Head Start

**Donna Denette**  
**Children First Enterprise, Inc.**  
Dear Commissioner and Members of the Board,

Thank you for all that work that you are each putting in to support all of us in the field of early education and care. I have so much that I want to tell you.

The good news is that many of us are doing this! We are making it through, day by day. And we are supporting each other like never seen before.

The hard news is that it is draining us, physically, mentally, emotionally...and quite literally draining our finances. Many of us share that this is not sustainable.

And, more importantly, we are looking at long-term damage to children and families. And I am speaking from a place of tremendous privilege, serving so many families that are from comfortable means.

- Children are not meant to learn through a computer screen. They need to move and engage and have relationships. Teachers need their full arsenal of tools, including non-verbals, body-language, facial cues, body placement cues, redirection, scaffolding...none of those things are effective through a screen. DESE is trying to force an actual school day through the computer screen. It's not working.
- Families are having to make hard choices. One labor and delivery nurse told me that she barely survived the spring, working all night and then supporting her 3 children throughout the day. Now she has gone through her savings as the pandemic rages on. She will leave her preschooler with us and remove the two school-agers and try to support them to attend school during the days again. All three of her boys have challenges. She is seeing how hard it is on the school-agers to function, despite our deep commitment to ensuring movement support, alternative seating, lots of outside time (we even hired a full-time extra staff member just to support as much break/movement/outside time as possible!). And when one of the three brothers has exclusionary symptoms, they all need to get sent home....unsustainable and damaging.
- Another nurse has two school-age boys, one with learning challenges, and she has taken a leave of absence, knowing that it may impact her long-term career goals.
- Families are paying for empty school-age slots as "insurance" against unpredictable school closures. And the longer that goes on, the more they contemplate one parent leaving the workforce.
- Centers are having to close classrooms or cross their fingers and chance "cross contamination" when a staff member is out. And closing classrooms hurts families, our economy, our relationships with families...and the fear of potentially infecting others is crushing to directors who are making these decisions.
- As cases rise and impact more centers, I fear that more centers will close their doors permanently.

What do we need:

- 1.) Alignment between DESE and DEEC on the issue of "household members" being part of the exclusionary requirements.
  - a. If not, DEEC needs to educate the health field about this critical difference. Pediatricians are unknowingly undermining the trust relationship between families and providers.

- b. Keeping this difference increases the workforce strain, as we are regularly losing teachers from the classroom because their own child doesn't feel well. Test-results timing can stretch this time out of the classroom to untenable lengths.
- 2.) Priority test responses for all educators (and their families if "household member" remains as exclusionary factor) to help us keep teachers working with children and our classrooms open.
- 3.) Pressure on DESE to reexamine the learning plans for children during this pandemic. Pretending that they can offer and expect participation in a regular 6.5 hour school day is short-sighted and is damaging the natural joy for learning in children that should be preserved at all costs.
- 4.) Statewide OST alignment of breaks (i.e., consistent across grades and across the state 20 minutes in AM, 40 minutes midday, and 20 minutes PM) to allow children to eat and get movement times in a careful, respectful, organized way that allows for appropriate supervision.
- 5.) FUNDING
  - a. Increased PPE support that takes into account program size
  - b. SOMETHING that helps us retain and reward educators!
  - c. Support for ventilation solutions for all programs

There is so much more, but there are dozens of unread emails, the BOH is waiting on more info, one child is not completing work on a daily basis and our facilitator reports that's not how she sees it, there are 6 texts from parents to answer, we need more bleach and paper towels, survey results need to be reviewed, and I need to figure out how to answer the families whose child throws up lots of mornings. And that's before 9 AM of my daily 12 hour day. Did I mention that this is unsustainable?

THANK YOU for your work to help us help families and provide safe, joyful learning opportunities to the Commonwealth's children.

Best,  
Donna M. Denette

**Mary Kinsella Scannell**  
**Boys & Girls Club of Dorchester**  
Good Morning

I am reaching out to share information with you about Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester's most recent experiences. Programs like ours are vital to the community; probably now more than ever. Through the years we have navigated times of tragedy and crisis with families to provide a safe place for their children and we remain committed to ensuring our families have the resources and support they need to navigate these uncertain times too.

We reopened our doors in July and are serving children and families in our early education and OST programs at a reduced capacity. It is important for us to be open. We are happy to have children breathing life back into the buildings again, but I do have conflicted feelings. The families need us, but rigid policies and stringent cleaning protocols mean staff are working harder than ever. The majority of people in this field are vulnerable members of the communities most impacted by the virus. Unlike schools, Early Education and OST Programs (Child Care and Out of School time) struggle with the tension between physical health and financial well-being. We are worried about the health risks but we had to re-open programs –for 2 reasons- families need us and to avoid financial collapse. Increased costs due to stringent

cleaning protocols, classroom environment changes and class size restrictions decrease our revenues, yet the same requirements that hurt us financially pay off by protecting public health.

We know the school closures during the pandemic took a disproportionate toll on our children and all those kids living in low-income neighborhoods. We know how hard things were for our families because we maintained weekly and in many cases, daily contact with families. During the spring my staff and I spent endless hours with families on face times calls, and sitting socially distanced on front porches. We delivered curriculum supports, food, diapers and baby formula. I was very proud of the way our staff refused to be defined by the circumstances of the world, but instead, chose to be inspired by the strength of the Dorchester community. Through this virtual world, I saw them become celebrity singers, excited cheerleaders, children's talk show guests, mad scientists, famous chefs, game show hosts, standup comedians, food distributors, art gurus, and parade route authorities-but most importantly, friends to lean on. The funding for the early childhood education and care system was broken before the pandemic, but the health crisis has magnified the issues and brought forth an opportunity to make change.

When we learned of the delay in school openings, we pivoted again, extending our summer programming into September. School age children in Boston have not returned to classrooms yet. The majority of the families we serve work in industries that require them to be out of the home. Parents are struggling , stressed and expressed feelings of hopelessness. We have changed our hours of operation, shifted the roles of staff and created Learning Hubs. Learning hubs provide safe, supported and supervised space where children can come to sign into their classrooms while they are learning remotely. Each day begins with Mindful Morning meditations and yoga. Children receive two meals and a snack, tech support, enrichment and guidance. On paper the plan sounds fabulous; I never imagined it would be one of the most challenging endeavors I have taken on.

I have been at Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester for 32 years, and I can honestly say I have never been more concerned for the children of this community. I believe the issues with remote learning models are multifaceted and not the fault of the agencies, systems or organizations involved. Learning this way was not expected or planned for so we are navigating uncharted territory. Every day I see our staff, parents, teachers, and principals doing the best they can, but it is not working well. I am hopeful we can create a more meaningful approach and create new strategies. I feel it is unreasonable to expect 6.5 hours of a traditional school day to be completed virtually. Children are experiencing headaches, frustrations and emotional difficulties. I am most troubled by the lack of joy and the absence of engagement I observe in remote learning. It breaks my heart. I am optimistic that the current situation at hand might provide an opportunity for EEC and DESE programs to build off of each other's strengths in innovative and new ways. Our staff live in the community and reflect the population served and they enjoy deep and meaningful relationships with the families. Our neighborhood focus puts us in a pivotal position to serve as the cultural broker between the families and the school. We can provide families with some of the basic supports that may affect a student's ability to learn and succeed, as the schools serve as a central location to connect the school community with available services that go beyond our capacity. Working together we can do so much more for our most vulnerable children and families and I look forward to exploring ways to collaborate in a meaningful way.

Community based organizations have stepped up since March to support families in very significant ways. I appreciate the fact that EEC has also pivoted quickly, shifting to support agencies and provide guidance. I am hopeful that as we move forward we will receive what we need to survive and succeed including; an extension of subsidized parent fees paid, funding shifted to per classroom vs. per child, flexibility in

approaches to learning for Learning Hub participants(vetted programs), improved access to Covid19 testing with quick results, and continuation of the flexibility required to provide families with programming. Thank you .

Best,  
Mary Kinsella Scannell

**Amanda Storth**  
**MA Association for the Education of Young Children (MAAEYC)**

Dear Chairwoman Lesaux,

My name is Amanda Storth, I am the Chair of the Public Policy Committee of the MA Association for the Education of Young Children (MAAEYC). We are the state affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the nation's largest and most influential organization of early childhood professionals. I have attached here NAEYC'S updated statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice as a reference for the complex and vital work that is done each and every day in our early childhood education settings.

MAAEYC's mission is to collaborate with families, educators and agencies to support high quality early childhood and education birth through age 8. We traditionally have been an organization focused on providing quality professional development for our workforce, and while our membership includes a broad swathe of the early childhood education community including; program administrators, higher-ed faculty, early intervention staff, and parents the largest cohort we represent are teachers and in classroom staff.

So, I write to you today not only to thank you for the incredibly important work you have done and continue to do in service to the children and families of Massachusetts and our Early Childhood Education community. I also write to urge you to prioritize measures that preserve and protect services that support our classroom teachers. This includes teacher preparatory programs, competitive and hazard pay and ongoing quality professional development. It is essential that we take immediate actions to honor the institutional knowledge and teaching skills represented in our workforce. A single teacher may represent years of hard earned, irreplaceable teaching experience that can do much to address several other concerns including how to handle increased instances of challenging behaviors as students respond to the stress and sometimes trauma of the past several months.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to this important matter.

Amanda Storth