**Board of Early Education and Care**

**Tuesday, October 12, 2021**

**1:00 PM – 4:00 PM**

**Virtual Meeting**

NOTE: This meeting will be broadcasted over EEC’s YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PelHVk-IcNs>

**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

Joni Block

Alison Schonwald, M.D.

Sheila Balboni

Paul Belsito

Jamella Lee

Mora Segal

Jocelyn Bowne, Associate Commissioner for Research and Program Innovation (EEC)

**The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM.**

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

1. Program Sustainability Strategy – Discussion
   * ARPA Stabilization Grant Update
   * EEOST Regulations - Vote
2. Program Continuous Quality Improvement Strategy- Discussion
3. Program Innovation and Expansion Ideas- Discussion
4. Budget Priorities – Discussion and Vote

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair**

Chairperson Lesaux welcomed the Board. We remain in an historic period for early education and remain focused on stabilization and pandemic recovery. Stated that the Board will be continuing conversations on innovation, sustainability, quality improvements and workforce support keeping budget priorities in mind for FY22.

**Comments from the Secretary**

No comments

**Comments from the Commissioner**

The Commissioner provided updates to emergency regulations that were passed in August. She highlighted that public comment is still ongoing, but a full summary will be provided in the upcoming days. Regulations were endorsed and nuanced comments were received regarding policy. Public comment did not warrant changing the regulations, but comments will be integrated into approach.

**Routine Business:**

Chairperson Lesaux made motion to approve minutes from August retreat and September 14, 2021 Board meeting with two separate votes. August retreat minutes – approved. September 14, 2021 Board meeting minutes – approved.

**Items for Discussion and Action:**

1. Program Sustainability Strategy – Discussion
   * ARPA Stabilization Grant Update
   * EEOST Regulations – Vote

Chairperson Lesaux stated that conversation today will focus on sustainability and strategy with an asset lens while keeping in mind conversations from last month regarding workforce.

Commissioner Aigner-Reworgy provided an overview of the agenda and highlighted the continuous work on critical components that we have talked about in pieces over the past year including the following:

* Business sustainability
  + Highlighting intentional work with program leaders
    - Focus on services delivered along with stable operating budget
* Continuous Quality Improvement
  + Integrated functions of EEC build a toolbox for leaders to understand foundational tools of compliance
* Innovation and Expansion
* Budget Priorities

There was discussion regarding sustainability, structure and access to quality care and standard curriculums. The Commissioner acknowledged that due to a shift in priorities due to COVID, we are now working to focus on sustainability for rebuilding infrastructure.

The Commissioner provided a summary of the information learned about program sustainability. The Commissioner brought attention to the fact that this information is from an aggregation of multiple data sources captured from each grant. The data and the trends are fueling research and design initiatives for FY22. New things are learned every day to quickly keep up with changing landscape and insight will be provided at a regular cadence to be thoughtful of FY23 implications.

Assistant Commissioner Bowne provided a summary of capacity analysis and insights into operational grant distribution outcomes. The discussion focused on systemwide trends of capacity, enrollment and workforce shortages.

* Overall program level capacity is at 90% of prior levels with small regional variations.
  + FCC capacity continues to be slightly smaller than GSA across all regions in the state.
* Enrollment numbers are lagging compared to reopening rates but they are trending up across all program types which is reassuring. Larger programs are showing lower percentages which may have to do with employment issues. Higher SVI communities have lower enrollment – higher percentage of FCC in SVI communities. Subsidized enrollment has continued to increase.
* Staffing levels are lower than projected due to low compensation which averages around or just above minimum wage for assistants and educators.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy highlighted that operational grants considered who was serving what types of communities to understand different business models that might be most effective to expand. There was discussion around the number of new providers reported and any geographic trends that can be seen from them.

Assistant Commissioner Bowne provided a summary of the stabilization grant analysis. She shared key metrics gathered from July and September data. There was discussion around the role of systems and how to improve engagement. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated that gaps in service were identified from the state grants in the spring and we were proactive to engage for this round. Support and technology are aligned to make sure that there is individualized support for providers. Chairperson Lesaux inquired about outreach and the Commissioner stated that there is targeted outreach to providers to determine barriers providers face to accessing the grant.

Assistant Commissioner Bowne provided data for take up rates. She stated that the data shows that funding is being directed towards communities that have the greatest need (BIPOC, gateway cities and high SVI). Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated that the goal was to find a simple formula to achieve equitable distribution of funding to tailor to cost of operations. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated that early indicators show that dollars are being distributed according to equity objectives, there is a high uptake rate due to ease of engagement but challenges remain for long term compensation strategies, specifically programs are hesitant to take on fixed operational costs with a six month grant. Incentives and enhancements are being considered as part of formula.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed three formula adjustments to enhance the grants

* Extend grant through FY22
* Funding adjustments
* Incentivize investments in compensation and benefits

There was discussion regarding the impact of available, affordable childcare on long term economic recovery. The Commissioner acknowledged the need to identify innovative approaches to government spending to sustain the infrastructure of the childcare sector. The Commissioner is looking forward to the ongoing conversations.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed two additional FY22 investments in stability including an EEC piloted curriculum to provide business supports to programs, as feedback from programs showed a gap in business foundational knowledge. The Commissioner provided an update on the EEOST program and shared that there was a huge demand for the program last year with 37 programs funded. There is still a need for smaller grants. The Commissioner asked the Board to sustain the modifications approved last year to continue making smaller grant investments.

Chairperson Leseaux: Vote to support EEOST Regulation Modifications – unanimously approved

2:21PM – 2:32PM break

Chairperson Leseaux: The Chairperson reconvened the meeting.

1. **Program Continuous Quality Improvement Strategy- Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided a summary of continuous quality improvements. The Commissioner provided an update on how regulations are being revised and restructured to allow for the fluid integration of technical assistance and quality improvement supports and align communication from licensing and monitoring in a feedback loop that will serve continuous quality improvement process. The Commissioner shared the objectives for the toolbox and lessons learned from current investments to help drive approach to procuring, identifying and revisiting the current thinking on support. The Commissioner acknowledged the long-standing challenge of aligning compliance with technological assistance and highlighted the importance of understanding the nuances of the childcare sector while we build the toolbox.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed the ongoing exploration of structuring licenses to allow for a targeted differential licensing approach driven from areas of concern and success based on historic work with programs. The Commissioner explained that the current license structure doesn’t distinguish between out of school time, early childhood, school age – new license structure will better align technical assistance and support structures targeted to specific practices for specific program types. The Commissioner discussed how the six categories of the regulations will be reorganized to apply across the program types.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed new operational systems and structures that are being tested to better integrate licensing and quality resources as new regulations are developed. There was discussion around progression and hierarchy of quality improvement areas and the need for a theory of action. The Commissioner responded that there is an ongoing process to dig deeper into to regulations to understand the operational impact before regulations are implemented. Commissioner Aigner-Treworthy discussed the initial thinking on how to structure technical assistance contracts in the upcoming few years.

There was discussion regarding a comprehensive community-based approach by aligning expectations and standards to ensure sustainability for all programs. The Commissioner acknowledged the complexity of program improvements that lead to robust community systems.

There was discussion regarding how to observe concrete behaviors to measure success while balancing motivation and accountability. The Commissioner acknowledged the challenge of mutual reinforcement and the continuous quality improvement process.

Commissioner Aigne-Treworgy highlighted investments being made regarding platforms and services, including Professional Development Centers, the Early Support Organization and the Pyramid Model. The Commissioner shared that technical assistance brings communities together in an efficient and cost-effective way to develop professional development at scale.

1. **Program Innovation and Expansion Ideas- Discussion**

Commissioner Aigne-Treworgy provided a summary of the changing needs of families and the emerging solutions. The Commissioner shared themes that emerged from engaging with families and employers and stated gaps in accessibility and affordability are shown and there needs to be innovation in the program models in order to support economic recovery. The Commissioner highlighted that the written materials include regularly reported case load numbers and stated that caseload numbers continue to increase. The Commissioner invited questions regarding the emerging themes

1. **Budget Priorities – Discussion and Vote**

Chairperson Lesaux discussed the process for releasing the Board’s budget memo highlighting priorities and reflecting a partnership with the agency. Chairperson stated that

Commissioner Aigne-Treworgy provided a summary of the FY23 budget priorities and highlighted the proposed objectives. The Commissioner stated that it’s necessary to re-evaluate the current funding and address gaps in the funding to meet the priorities.

Chairperson Lesaux stated that lessons learned from the pandemic have shown the importance of addressing the framework in order to move forward, rather than return to baseline.

Secretary Peyser acknowledged that the system needs to be sustained, rebuilt and strengthened as we move forward as demand for childcare services continues to increase. The Secretary acknowledged that a more flexible and innovative system is needed to meet the needs of employers and families. The Secretary commented that the budget choices made for FY23 and beyond can allow a pivot for the way we think about the childcare system. There was discussion regarding the different levels of budget priorities and their interconnectedness. Further discussion regarding the lessons learned from Covid and the critical need for quality, affordable childcare. Now is the time to think innovatively and provide funding to allow the system to be more responsive to families and the workforce.

Chairperson Lesaux provided comment that a major statewide investment is needed to build on the momentum from the federal level. There was discussion regarding the continuum of educational supports for birth to grade three, regardless if families access childcare. Discussion continued regarding the budget priorities and the need to sync them together to create the biggest gains. Further discussion of public private partnerships and the need for investment in community level integration.

Chairperson Lesaux provided closing comments and expressed appreciation of the connectedness of the agenda items to drive the budget discussion. The Board will follow-up with the budget memo and conversations will continue.

**Meeting is adjourned at 4:00 PM**