

**Board of Early Education and Care  
Tuesday, September 14, 2021  
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM  
Virtual Meeting**

NOTE: This meeting will be broadcasted over EEC's YouTube Channel: <https://youtu.be/06EyYD7mhgY>

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**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

Nicki Ruiz

Mora Segal

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

**Welcome and Comments from the Chair**

Chairperson Lesaux welcomed the Board. Acknowledged the intensive and busy landscape for education sector given the ongoing nature of the pandemic, along with historic investments in early education and care. Stated the Board will spend time today hearing from the Commissioner continuing the conversation from August regarding workforce and looking ahead in terms of short and long term and the upcoming budget process for next year.

**Comments from the Secretary**

Secretary Peyser state that schools are open fully in-person with universal mask requirements for students and staff. In October there will be an option for schools with 80% vaccination rate or higher combined students and staff to require masks only for those who are unvaccinated. Support is provided by an

expanded testing program, including general universal surveillance testing as well as rapid testing options in order to minimize quarantining for close contacts. This is up and running in most, if not all schools in the Commonwealth. Outside of context of schools, the Governor has issued an executive order requiring all state employees to be fully vaccinated by October 17, 2021 and has encouraged private and public employers to do the same. On the federal level, President announced there will be a mandate for all federal employees, including head start employees to be vaccinated. The head start requirement goes into effect January 2022 so there is time for compliance. OSHA is also developing requirements to apply to private employers with more than 100 employees which will most likely not affect our licensed providers but there is a growing movement to extend vaccine requirements from the public into private sector and may go into effect on an emergency basis in the next few months. These state and federal initiatives are designed to contain the spread of COVID and keep our schools and programs open and fully in person.

### **Comments from the Commissioner**

The Commissioner reflected on the August retreat – appreciative of time taken for broad thinking and conversations regarding all the data discussed at the retreat. Outlined themes from the retreat that emerged as continuous goals for the Board to guide the departments work:

- Focus on child care as an opportunity for innovative approaches to community and system development
- Affordability – look at all family affordability. Prioritize subsidized families in thinking about targeting and expanding access and adjust policies to ease access while also understanding the overall market rate and affordability for all families that are heading back to work in the fall and understanding our role to develop public momentum to address challenge.
- Innovation – look into what is needed to help support child care field and industry to better help meet parents needs as those needs change.
- Business investments – look into how childcare models might need to shift or be incentivized to operate differently
- Data utilization – continuing to build our capacity to come back with appropriate data tracking and metrics to measure day to day decisions and efficacy towards larger goals.
- Workforce – looking at providers as employers and how they can provide benefits for workforce and how we as a public partner can help incentivize, financially support or defray costs for operational investments to support existing workforce and also recruit an adequately trained workforce that is diverse and reflective of the communities they serve. This will require recruitment pipelines and innovation on how we prepare the workforce.

### **Routine Business:**

Chairperson Lesaux made motion to approve two sets of minutes from June 8 ,2021 Board meeting and August 31, 2021 Emergency meeting with two separate votes. Approval of Minutes from June 8, 2021 Meeting - unanimously approved. August 31, 2021 Emergency Meeting – Carolyn Kain, Jamella Lee, Nicki Ruiz abstained (not present) - approved

### **Items for Discussion and Action:**

#### **1. Fall 2021 Updates—Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided overview of agenda and highlighted different approach to agenda. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy summarized initiatives to support our programs to remain healthy and safe, as well as open and operational during the Covid19 pandemic, including the following:

- PPE – continue to operate ordering system we secured through a state contract. Providers can order directly which eliminates involvement from regional offices and defrays operational costs for programs
- Testing strategies – mobile testing sites will remain open for families, workforce and anyone associated with childcare to get quick responses for PCR testing
  - Assessing locations to ensure the 5 sites are as accessible as possible and will expand as necessary if numbers shift.
  - Pool testing – launched in partnership with Neighborhood Villages. Over 15,000 people signed up and continuing to expand. Leveraging free federal tests. Providers don't have school district -infrastructure for support so we partnered with nonprofit to provide operational support.
- Parental subsidy tuition – continuing flexibility, including paying on enrollment instead of attendance
- Mask mandates – continue to assess
- Continued flexibility – no documentation requirements for parents who need childcare for re-entrance to workforce, continuing to utilize digital documentation for reauthorization of subsidies; continue to waive parent copays which will be funded through the calendar year with FY22 budget language.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed that funding for full day services for afterschool and out of school time programs have ended due to schools being required to be back in person full day for all students and the state of emergency ending. There was discussion about whether full day services would resume if schools close. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated that Federal government does not allow for federal funding to go towards two different educational services during the school day. We were able to negotiate when remote learning was allowed but now that remote learning isn't allowed except in cases where children are exempted from school due to quarantine from exposure since they can't be at childcare sites either at that time. Secretary Peyser noted that it is the intention for schools to remain open. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the Department currently have a significantly better system in place now to support providers.

## **2. FY21 State Grant & FY22 ARPA Grant Update—Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an update on the ARPA Grant:

- ARPA stabilization grants are 6-month operational grants targeted to licensed providers. Allow for more flexibility in operational investments than spring grants
- Deeper dive into data coming in October
- Based on a few weeks of data, we tied the expenditures and data from both grants to inform future investments and the implications and policy parameters that need to be in place for additional investment
- Data is limited because we wanted to get the 30 million in funds targeted to the workforce out quickly. Built in data collection to monitor the efficacy of the grants for the two main challenges – compensation for workforce and affordability for parents

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an update on data trends noting that over 70% of programs have taken up grant. This uptake rate is higher in subsidized programs. This data is seen across the Commonwealth. Regions that have higher subsidized program percentages are seeing higher uptake rates. The formula that we developed is helping programs in gateway cities and census tracts that are majority BIPOC populations and communities that have the highest vulnerability indices. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the workforce crisis is more severe than originally thought. We were conservative with the numbers in our formula that consisted of how many educators so we could prioritize those with more of an investment in workforce and our conservative numbers are already showing to be higher than what is playing out on the ground. We are seeing 15% less educators than projected. We need to understand if we put in this infusion of government funding what kind of strategies do we need to make sure that there is a long term impact on compensation challenges so that family affordability is not impacted.

There was discussion on whether the Department is seeing an investment in compensation increases, or benefits. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the Department has not seen the investment that we can track at this point. This data is from the state grants that went towards one-time stipends, bonuses and a significant percentage went towards material supports like food and lunch for staff. This is just the first few weeks of reporting and we will get better data from the state grants but as we've looked at it, we are not seeing investments in the fixed costs of benefits either.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy noted the Department is continuing outreach to providers who haven't applied yet as there's no time frame to apply during the six months and continue to work with our partners like Strategies for Children to do direct outreach and support people as much as possible.

### **3. Streamlining Hiring Requirements—Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an update on the workforce shortage crisis. The grant data shows that the workforce crisis continues to be the most limiting factor in being able to expand capacity. There was discussion about getting assistants certified as teachers and any focus on training. Utilizing the workforce in place to the maximum extent available since workforce shortages are everywhere so it's important to look at who do we have and what roles can we play in getting assistants that are working certified as teachers. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the Department is working on systems to eliminate barriers to training and retention.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an update on the workforce pipeline including access to Higher Education, workforce pipeline education recruitment, and career pathways. There was discussion about pathways progression from other industries and how the Department is using partnerships to inform decisions

### **4. Supporting Educator Pipelines—Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided an update on Department initiatives to address workforce crisis, including hiring requirements, educator pipelines, EEC credentials, and timeline for implementation. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy summarized policy and protocol changes. There was discussion about strategies to maintain stability of the field.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy discussed the professional registry, an online system to house educator information currently stored between multiple systems, including credentials, training, and background checks. There was discussion on ensuring safeguards and protection of information related to background checks. There was discussion about the workforce crisis and investments in access to higher education, and public private partnerships.

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy the framework working draft for MA ECE Credential and how educators can demonstrate competency. There was discussion on whether there will be standardized objective measures for work experience path. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the Department is working to develop standard objective measures that can be validated through a submitted portfolio. National advocates and work on competency-based education has resulted in a competency test but there is a challenge in implementing that and not running into the same barriers seen in other sectors. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the Department is trying to learn from and align with innovative work on competency translating to college credits.

## **5. Budget Updates—Discussion**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided update on the budget. FY21 funding is finalized and submitted the required spending plan for FY22

- Caseload enrollments are increasing but not near 55,000 anticipated. In July 44,000
  - Looking at waitlist and understanding access challenges
  - Continued to keep flex pool open to allow contract providers to enroll over the number they are contracted for.
  - Continued gaps in families with vouchers choosing to go back into care
  - Last year legislature put an operational reserve so that funding that was underspent could be spent on operations independent of enrollment
    - Will use additional funds to supplement FY22 for PPE and testing
- FY22 Priorities
  - Staffing
  - Workforce Development
  - Field Supports

Chairperson Lesaux stated that the role of Board is to amplify and enhance the priorities of the agency. The responsibility of the Board to support the Commissioners team and the work of the agency. There was discussion about aligning priorities and maximize opportunities. Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy stated the Department needs to understand our role to integrate the sector and have people understand our sector. Not able to create more slots – it's not about a slot for a child, it's about infrastructure to make slot healthy and safe

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy provided closing remarks – today is balance between immediate next steps and long-term plan of integrating systems and what kinds of investments are needed. Needs to be sustainable for programs and families that rely on services. Recognize that our role is understand the comprehensive nature of resources families need and how we can support. Thank you to Board for being part of building robust system that extends beyond EEC.

Chairperson Lesaux: Thank you for conversations. Thank you to Commissioner, team, and field for ongoing work. Summer was positive and moving in right direction, but field still needs support. We will continue conversations and be in touch.

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