Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care
May 19, 2023 Public Sharing Session Webinar
Meeting Notes and Questions and Answers

Speakers:
Eloisa Melendez, Lead Planner and Manager of the Blue Ribbon Panel, Office of Early Childhood, and Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy called the meeting to order and introduced Kyle Pilon, Project Manager, Office of Early Childhood.

Meeting Notes:
Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy and Kyle Pilon presented: *Equity and Access Workgroup*, which covered problems and opportunities and early draft recommendations Related to:
- Unmet Need for Early Care and Education
- Affordability
- Parent Engagement and Navigation
- Community Voice
- Child and Family Outcomes

Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy and Kyle Pilon described the Equity and Access workgroup Scope and Goals
- Equity and Access is one of four workgroups in Blue Ribbon Planning; the other three being Workforce and Quality, Systems and Funding and Costs
- Equity and Access places children and families at the center of the Early Childhood Care and Education System
- The workgroup also established equity as a pillar throughout Blue Ribbon Planning
- Equity is defined as "in practice, equity means all children and families receive necessary supports in a timely fashion so they can develop their full intellectual, social, and physical potential."
- The OEC is committed to: "intentionally work to dismantle any systemic racism that may be embedded within policies and practices affecting all aspects of early childhood."
- The definition of access is broad and multidimensional, drawing from the ACF definition
- The goal of the workgroup is to ensure that all Connecticut families have expanded access to affordable, high-quality ECE that prepares each and every child for future learning and improved well-being
- There are sub-goals related to:
  - Expanding supply to address unmet need
  - Expanding affordable access
  - Engaging all parents
  - Enhancing all families' navigation

- o   Ensuring community voice
- o   Developing a child and family information and outcomes system

Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy and Kyle Pilon described the Equity and Access workgroup draft recommendations and answered questions

- The draft recommendations reviewed represent an initial set of ideas generated by the workgroup based on current work and promising practice here and across the country related to the five issue areas:
    - o   Unmet Need for Early Care and Education
        - ■   Improve demand and supply tracking systems
        - ■   Increase funding options for facility expansion and start-ups
        - ■   Expand access in areas of high need by leveraging existing local partnerships
        - ■   Incentivize the development of additional infant and toddler slots
        - ■   Increase the supply of programs equipped to meet the need of all children
        - ■   Change ratio and group sizes and regulations
        - ■   Assess the feasibility of extending CT's paid parental leave program
        - ■   Expand access to and ensure better utilization of state funded programs
    - o   Affordability
        - ■   Ensure subsidy system reaches eligible families and is responsive to parent needs
        - ■   Expand child care subsidy funding
        - ■   Increase affordability of child care for middle income families just out of reach of subsidies and unable to access state funded programs
        - ■   Limit family payment to a recommended amount based on their income level
    - o   Parent Engagement and Navigation
        - ■   Recognize families as key decision-makers in the ECE system at the local and state level
        - ■   Develop a parent navigation system that is available in multiple languages, inclusive, and easily accessible that is designed to cater to the diverse range of family needs and preferences and could consist of a technology platform and trusted local resources (e.g., parent ambassadors/navigators)
        - ■   Ensure information is organized, accessible, and available in multiple languages to engage parents as partners in children's overall development and well-being
    - o   Community Voice
        - ■   Design an appropriately resourced and consistently funded hub-based community resource system in order to raise up community needs and priorities and provide input into resource allocation decisions
    - o   Child and Family Outcomes

- Implement a statewide system to assess Connecticut's children early learning and development from birth to age 5 by leveraging an existing platform
- Design and develop a data and outcomes system to track families' ability to equitably access affordable care

Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy concluded the meeting:
- Encouraged attendees to attend future sessions and advised on where to find more information, as well as where to ask questions.
- Offered to meet with groups of families and/or providers who convene to share more information or hear their concerns.
- Expressed gratitude for attendees' participation, questions and comments.

Questions and Answers:

Note: This is a compilation of questions and topics that pertain to the Equity and Access workgroup draft recommendation and process. These questions and topics have been consolidated and paraphrased, drawing on the Public Sharing Session, the transcripts of questions and answers and chat from the webinar, as well as feedback from other stakeholders. This does not include questions that are expected to be covered by other workgroups going forward.

Blue Ribbon Planning Workgroup Structure and Process:

*Q: What are the **workgroups** and how is this process structured? How are the **draft recommendations** developed?*
A: The planning process has been divided into four workgroups; Equity and Access, which centers on children and families, and establishes equity as a pillar throughout planning, is the first. Each of the workgroups is composed of OEC co-leads, team members who are OEC staff, expert advisors, and consultant support. The workgroups generate an initial draft of potential recommended strategies or ideas to achieve workgroup goals based on promising current work underway here in Connecticut or elsewhere. Please also see Blue Ribbon Panel Structure slides from the April 19 launch meeting on the Blue Ribbon Panel [website](#) for an overview of the process.

*Q: How will **feedback** be incorporated? How will these draft **recommended strategies** be changed over time?*
A: After the public sharing session, responses to questions and feedback will be posted on the website. Based on the feedback from the public, panel members, and other stakeholders, the draft recommendations will be modified and prioritized. These recommendations will be further refined based on potential for impact and feasibility. This may lead to adapted or additional recommendations that will be defined more concretely, including proposed structural and programmatic changes,

investment, timeline, measurable goals, and expected outcomes. These revised recommendations will be shared in a draft outline form in September and in final report form in November/December. Feedback is welcome any time throughout this process. Please see the Blue Ribbon Panel website to access the feedback form.

Equity:

Q: How is the workgroup defining **equity***?*
A: The OEC, the Association for Children and Families (ACF), and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) all emphasize the importance of equity, which NAEYC describes as: *"all children and families receive necessary supports in a timely fashion so they can develop their full intellectual, social, and physical potential."*
Specifically, the OEC has pledged in its updated mission statement to*: "intentionally work to dismantle any systemic racism that may be embedded within policies and practices affecting all aspects of early childhood."*

Unmet need:

*Q: What is meant by "***expanded access***"? Is* **there data about current access***? Can this be quantified?*
A: By "expanded access", we are referring to care that is truly accessible to families, relying on using the ACF definition: "…parents, with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs." This factors in the ability of a parent to be able to afford and get to the program, too; e.g., is it on public transportion? We do have some rough estimates of current access, but we need better demand and supply data to be able to be more accurate here. There is also a map of child care deserts on the Center for American Progress website.

Q: How is access to care **impacted by workforce shortages***?*
A: Early Childhood Care and Education workforce shortages are contributing significantly to unmet need for care. The Workforce and Quality and Systems workgroups will be addressing these challenges.

Q: What is the **unmet need for infants and toddlers***?*
A: The current estimates range from 12-21K, depending on parent preferences for formal versus informal care. This is an area where we would like to understand true parent demand better. And it is important to note that this number is well below the 50,000 shortage that OEC was estimating in 2018 due to additional research and understanding the impact of CT's paid leave program.

Q: Why is **unmet need concentrated in infant and toddler care***?*

A: There is greater supply for preschool age child care due to more options (e.g. public school) and better profitability of this age. It is much more expensive to care for infants and toddlers. The adult to child ratios are higher for infants and toddlers versus older children. It is often not in providers financial interest to open infant and toddler classrooms, even if there is demand.

*Q: What is the **Family Child Care Incubator model**?*
A: It is a pilot program that enables the OEC to issue family child care licenses to persons and groups who wish to offer child care services that exist outside of a home in a shared space to partner with an association, organization, corporation, institution, or agency, public or private. A model in New Britain is piloting this as a way to build family child care capacity.

*Q: Have you **identified specific populations or areas of the state which are currently or historically marginalized**?*
A: There is data on low opportunity communities. For example, the OEC relied on the National Center for Disease Control & Prevention's Social Vulnerability Index to prioritize the distribution of stabilization funding. We also know significant gaps exist in rural parts of the state. However, systems to capture more up-to-date and specific supply and demand data with a focus on equity are needed.

*Q: You mention **partnerships with public schools** as a way to expand access. What about community-based programs? Will public schools be held to the same standards?*
A: There is no one type of provider that will work for all families. Parents clearly want and need a mixed delivery system and the OEC is committed to supporting all types of providers. We want to leverage all options for families that increase access for a wide range of family needs. For example, community-based programs often offer hours that are better aligned with families' work hours, while public school programs may offer transportation to and from school. Currently, public schools that accept OEC funding are required to undergo an inspection, background checks and meet other agency general protocol guidelines.

*Q: What is known about **Care4Kids applications that are deemed ineligible**?*
A: Most ineligible applications are due to not meeting work or training requirements or income thresholds. Ineligibility is not tracked by race and ethnicity. It should also be noted that state regulations related to eligibility are not as permissive as federal guidelines.

*Q: Will the system **support the needs of diverse and neurodivergent learners**? Access to appropriate care is an issue of equity.*
A: Yes, the expectation is to build a system that truly works for all children. We do not pretend this goal is an easy lift. We know it is a significant challenge for families and we will work with the State Department of Education (SDE) through the panel process to develop preschool special education

approaches that are more family friendly and supportive of the child's learning and care needs. (e.g., public school SPED services in community-based programs, schedules for SPED public preschools that are more aligned with family needs)

Q: There are recommendations to **expand the use of contracted slots** *(specifically for infants and toddlers),* **as well as invest more in the subsidy system***. Is it strategic to do both at the same time?*
A: Good question. These are the types of decisions we will need to weigh as we have more specific options to consider.

Affordability:

Q: What is your **definition of affordable***? Will this vary by town? Do you have data to share on this?*
A: There is not a quantitative definition at this time. The OEC has an updated equitable parent co-pay schedule that could be a starting point. There are meaningful differences in the cost of living across the state, so these need to be considered as well. The new co-pay approach has differential percentages based on family income, with higher income earners paying a higher percentage of their income toward care, with 9.5% as the top rate for families earning at or below 75% of the state median income level.

Q: Is the potential for **universal child care** *being considered? Will there be a system put in place to* **help families pay for child care at all financial levels***?*
A: "Out-of-the-box" ideas to make child care more affordable will be considered. At the same time, the ultimate decisions related to affordability will reflect expectations about future funding. Part of the work of the panel is to try to identify new sources of funding and make the case for this future investment.

Parent Engagement and Navigation:

Q: How will the **parent navigation system improve on Child Care 2-1-1?** *Sometimes 2-1-1 is out of date. Will in-person local resources be provided?*
A: 2-1-1 already provides some navigation support. The hope is to ultimately be able to have more thorough and up-to-date tracking of parent needs and preferences, as well as real-time provider supply. In addition, the system envisioned includes both a technological platform, as well as on-the-ground local resources that can serve as trusted advisors. Local resources are especially important for families with limited-to-no technological access. There are already local resources in place here to build upon, such as the Family Resource Centers, and the Local Early Childhood Collaboratives. It is also incumbent on the panel to create a system that is more simplified and does not require so much navigation.

Q: Is there a way for families to access a range of services they need, in addition to child care, through **one access point***?*

A: Yes, that would be a goal of the system to make it easier for families to access all their potential needs for their child. This system would link to MyCT for other benefits, like housing, SNAP, and HUSKY. OEC's IT Director is currently leading the MyCT integration work and OEC is one of the first agencies in the MyCT portal.

*Q: Why are **parent decision-making and leadership training** in the same recommendation?*
A: They are two different things. And it may make sense to separate. Parents hold expertise and a unique and valuable perspective, but they are not always provided the opportunities to be heard. And CT has seen significant growth in parent voice and leadership through a variety of parent leadership training program offerings like PLTI. These efforts are often linked to early childhood organizations and planning entities in communities. Separately, OEC Parent Cabinet members have indicated that they have benefitted from and appreciated the opportunity to receive training on how to lead community conversations. The purpose of this recommendation is to support a variety of means to ensure parents have voice and agency in the multiple layers of the early care and education system. We need to ensure that parent voice and provider voice are considered in balance, and it will take active effort to assure parent voice and needs are considered equitably in decision making.

Community Voice:

*Q: Would **the new hub-based community resource system replace Local Early Childhood and School Readiness Councils**?*
A: The Local Early Childhood and School Readiness Councils are important local resources and they could be the building blocks to cover more of the geographies in a given hub area. The recommendations in this area need to be further fleshed out. Please let us know any related thoughts and ideas.

Q: Could we have a community report card showing how well each community responds to children's needs?
A: This is an interesting idea. Some communities have this already. A common needs assessment could be the foundation for something like this. The Panel is looking for examples in other states that have done this well.

Child and Family Outcomes:

*Q: If **CT DOTS is universally collected from programs**, how would it be used?*
A: CT DOTS snapshot summaries of a child's development, allowing teachers to monitor progress over time and have informed conversations with parents. When pulled together across classrooms, programs, or geographies, CT DOTS can also serve to summarize learning and development for groups of children. The State Department of Education will be using the CT DOTS for its preschool special

education requirements or OSEP reporting. The Panel will also be looking at other systems like high Scope and Teaching Strategies Gold to consider the benefits of a system that is regularly standardized and updated and used in other states.

*Q: Is there any data from **School Readiness** that gives a sense of **child outcomes**?*
A: This has been a weakness in CT's system for years, that OEC is working to correct. With the development of ECE Reporter and a change in identifying all students in OEC programs with an identifier that can be linked to SDE systems, OEC will have better data going forward. In 2016, there was a [Regression Discontinuity](#) study performed to assess the impact of state funded preschool. Study findings indicated that when children are enrolled in Connecticut's state-funded School Readiness full-day or school-day prekindergarten program there are positive impacts on a number of their kindergarten readiness skills. Specifically, the analyses conducted indicates that students enrolled in these prekindergarten programs display more proficient (1) early literary and (2) early numeracy skills as measured by the WJ-IV test than students not enrolled in the program. Alternatively, being enrolled in these programs does not seem to have an impact on these students' oral comprehension or picture vocabulary skills.

*Q: Are there plans to issue a **unique identifier** for all children that is used in all systems across the state?*
A: Yes. This is in process now and will link with SDE.

Feedback:

*Q: Will we receive **a survey**? Will there be **other opportunities for feedback**?*
A: Yes, there is a survey available, as well as the slides and a recorded link of the meeting and there is a link to provide feedback available on the Blue Ribbon Panel website [here](#).

Thank you for your interest and please continue to follow our progress on the Blue Ribbon website!