

**Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care
July 6, 2023 Sharing Session**

Welcome/Introduction to Sharing Session

Eloisa Melendez introduced interpretation instructions for those requesting Spanish interpretation of the meeting.

Commissioner Beth Bye called the meeting to order and shared the objective of the session

The OEC Systems workgroup to share initial recommendations, and elicit feedback and solutions from the field and public.

Meeting agenda:

Workgroup Context

- Commissioner Bye shared additional information about today's session
 - The Systems workgroup overlaps with the equity and access discussions the Panel has been having
 - Trying to simplify and streamline the systems to make them work for families, programs, and communities to support the economy
- "We have a once in a generation chance to improve the child care system." - Commissioner Bye
- Systems is the third of four interdependent workgroups presented to the Blue Ribbon Panel
 - These workgroups can be adjusted once final recommendations has been made by Blue Ribbon Panel
- Grounding the Panel in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
 - Viewing child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment
 - Keeping the child in mind (what they need, where they live, their families, and communities)

Draft Recommendations to the Blue Ribbon Panel, presented by Jill Marini and Cathy Lenihan

- Systems goal: build an equitable, efficient ECE system that is informed by current data and that fosters the sustainable provision of high-quality programs and services for young children and their families in Connecticut
- The workgroup has drafted recommended strategies to the Blue Ribbon Panel according to three key categories:
 - Funding Systems
 - Governance
 - Program Enrollment & Operations and Data & Outcomes
- Funding Systems Recommendations:

- Consolidate the number of state-funded ECE funding sources from five (School Readiness, Child Day Care, Smart Start & Smart Start for Recovery, State Head Start Supplement, Care4Kids) to one.
- Fund programs by classroom, based on blocks of time (informed by local community needs).
- Deploy unified state funding to programs through State of Connecticut Purchase of Service (POS) contracts, rather than the current mix of grants and POS contracts; distribute payments directly to programs, quarterly in advance of service provided, rather than through contractors/fiscal agents.
- Appoint regional ECE governance bodies (aligned with intermediary regional governance structure in Governance recommendations) to assess unmet need for high quality ECE by community every three years; and develop an annual plan for local disbursement of state funds allocated to communities in alignment with demonstrated needs and local assets.
- Convert the funding structure to reflect the true cost of care rather than market rates.
- **Governance Recommendations:**
 - Create and fund a cohesive governance system that covers all towns, and provides an opportunity for local partnership and collaboration to allocate state funding.
 - Design and fund an intermediary regional governance structure to support local bodies.
 - Create support at the state level to bolster capacity of local and regional governance bodies.
 - Create a common needs assessment, with common data collection across local governance bodies.
- **Program Enrollment and Operations Recommendations:**
 - Create a unified navigation system that provides a central location for families and providers to access all necessary information for child care in the state of Connecticut.
 - Provide incentives to programs that utilize systems (i.e., navigation system, assessment system, business supports, and Care4Kids) to improve business practices.
 - Provide resources and supports for providers (informed by provider feedback loops) such as a shared services plan and onboarding supports for newly licensed programs.
- **Data and Outcomes Recommendations:**
 - Enhance and integrate existing data systems (i.e., Provider 360 Portal, Registry, etc.) to support the creation of a comprehensive data system for providers that unifies program data entry and invoicing processes for state-funded programs.
 - Streamline process for families to access child care information and availability.
 - Collect common needs assessment data from local and regional governance bodies, and provide data on OEC website.
 - Implement a statewide system to assess Connecticut children's early learning and development from birth to age 5 that will be linked to the State Department of

Education and local school kindergarten enrollment processes, by leveraging an existing platform.

- Create a transparent statewide data dashboard to share aggregate operations data and outcome measures with the field.

Breakout Sessions

- Eloisa Melendez facilitated the dissemination of breakout sessions for each topic (Funding, Governance, Program Enrollment & Operations, and Data & Outcomes).

Funding:

- Would like to see funding continue and expand past 5 funding sources; strong need to incorporate funding together and simplify things to move system forward
- Additional research to be done to determine the true cost of care
- Discussions around simplifying Purchase of Service (POS) contracts
- Using intentional verbiage as to not instill fear or concern with the word “classroom, because; family home care providers don’t call it a classroom.
- Regionalization to build on strengths of communities and support an infrastructure for local councils; providers raised concerns with regional governance bodies
- Discussion around the role of Care_4_Kids in regards to state funding and state-funded programs; consider that large, undocumented communities don't apply for Care 4 Kids, so the state funding programs don't make ends meet because they don't get those funds; suggestion to look at Vermont’s expansion as it is very different from New York universal pre-k; need to ensure that it leads to stabilization for providers
- “Complexity leads to inequity.” - Dr. Valora Washington; discussion around importance of simplifying the system
- Consider a sliding scale to add flexibility for child care hours; should consider a half-day, school day, full-day, full-year; should also consider contracts as opposed to grants
- Providers who don’t offer traditional care but would like some funding support for the care they’re giving
- The goal is to make it easier for families and to provide stability for providers
- Importance that child care isn't an island and the importance of connecting families and early care educators with the public school districts, Birth to Three, ECCP, social service providers, healthcare, etc.

Governance

- Support for regional approach; expressed concerns around who would be on Governance; would individuals have ECE background to make decisions that are developmentally appropriate?
- Providers expressed concerns about ensuring accuracy and simplicity of the new governance system; early childhood educators needs to be able to trust that this is

viewed as a valued endeavor; need to feel this profession is important and will get what it needs

- From a governance perspective, there is a need to ensure all providers are considered - private non-profit programs have felt excluded and that funding is not shared with private care
 - Need fiscal transparency and simplicity to benefit providers and build trust within field
 - Focus on the ability to have sustainability within the field, which needs to be tied to funding not dependent on the legislative session; that is an important factor for the Governance committee
 - Suggestion for a collaborative assessment of all providers in order to determine how the governance would be helpful to all
- *Program Enrollment & Operations and Data & Outcomes*
- Provider asked if there would be a new data system or would it be integrated into the current 211 system; OEC team shared a vision around building on current systems for a system that was more community-based and interactive, and engaged with financing for families
 - Suggestion for something like a common application for college by way of a family profile which would store all family information and make it better for providers - reduce administrative burden for programs; consider the South Carolina approach
 - Highlighted the importance of making sure smaller providers have support or ability to update websites or profiles; consider community-based organizations or libraries to offer a central place for access to the system
 - Ensure the system would help families simplify the process of finding care; including Head Start programs
 - Looking at all systems working together; individual child records are connected with an SDE identifier so when they transition over to SDE it is easy for us to track a child service; it will track the needs so that it will inform the unmet need and when spaces are renewed in the community, that data is given to the governing body to make decisions
 - OEC highlighted Provider 360 as a revolutionary tool where data from many OEC systems come together - enrollments in one place, payments in one place
 - Discussion around incentivizing non-state-funded programs to engage in platforms and recommendation around choosing ONE assessment system (DOTS, etc.)

Timeline & Wrap-up

- Commissioner Bye concluded the session by reiterating Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of the child at the center and encouraged the group to keep thinking about these recommendations and their ideas from their perspectives.



- Eloisa Melendez shared the link for feedback via the Blue Ribbon Panel website.