

**Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care**  
**September 11, 2023 Sharing Session Minutes**  
**Bridgeport, Housatonic Community College**

**Welcome/Agenda:**

Commissioner Bye called the meeting to order and shared the objective of the session: to review the Blue Ribbon Panel Draft Outline and hear feedback from parents and providers.

Commissioner Bye and Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy presented the context of the Blue Ribbon Panel, its pillars, and the goals and objectives of the Outline.

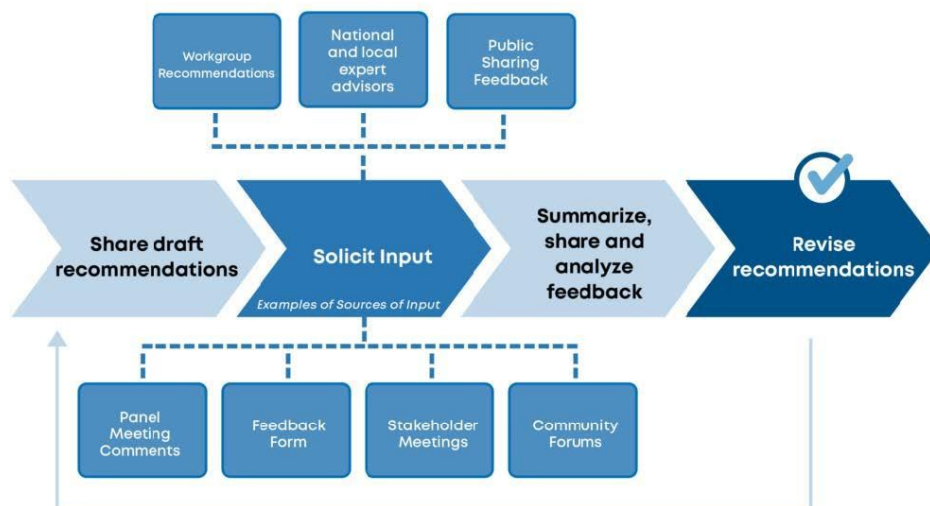
**Blue Ribbon Panel Context:**

*The Charge to the Blue Ribbon Panel:*

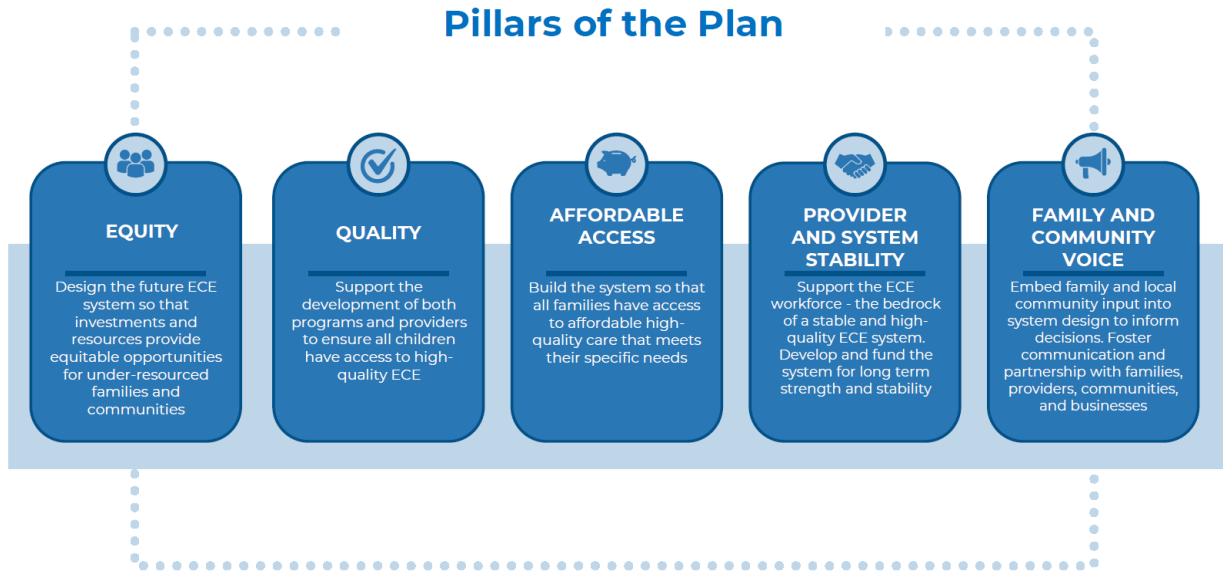
- The Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care was initiated by Governor Lamont’s Executive Order.
- The Panel is charged with developing a strategic plan for a child care system that works for families, providers, and Connecticut’s economy.
- The Panel will outline a data-driven, actionable, 5-year strategic plan for Connecticut that supports family needs, business needs, and prioritizes equitable access to early care and education.

*Feedback and Iteration:*

- The recommendations presented today are the result of several months of input and iteration from workgroups, advisors, stakeholder meetings, and public feedback.
- The draft outline will be reviewed and updated by the Blue Ribbon Panel and used to write the final plan that will be submitted to the Governor.



Draft Outline Review:



*Overarching Vision for the 5-Year Plan*

- **WHAT:** All families will have access to an **equitable, high-quality, and affordable** early childhood education (ECE) system. Building on investments the State has made, this plan will **center on the needs of children and families**, enabling children to learn and thrive, and families to work.
- **HOW:** Implemented over 5 years, the plan will **prioritize historically under-resourced groups and communities** and will take care to **honor the existing workforce**.
- **WHY:** A strong ECE system will benefit our **communities and economy** by helping to attract and retain young families, increase workforce participation – especially among women – and grow the State’s economy.



*The envisioned system aims to benefit families, providers, and communities:*

**Families:**

- More **accessible and affordable high-quality child care** that meets all families' needs
- Access to **information and resources** to help families find the care they need
- Greater opportunities to **lead and advocate** at all levels of the system

**Providers:**

- More **funding and resources** to compensate and support the professional growth of educators
- Access to more affordable **health insurance** options
- **Simplified systems** to reduce administrative burdens on programs
- Greater **enrollment and program operations support** to enable efficiencies and stability
- **Facilities funding** and incentives for addressing unmet needs, accessible by all types of programs

**Communities:**

- **Representation of all local stakeholders** to ensure that families, providers, local municipalities, schools, businesses, and community leaders have a voice
- **State-wide local governance structures** to efficiently and equitably allocate resources based on the specific needs of a community
- Access to **accurate and timely local information** to make informed decisions that help communities thrive

**Blue Ribbon Panel Plan Goals**

*Goal 1:*

- **Workforce:** Invest in and support the retention and recruitment of a professional, high-quality ECE workforce

*Goal 2:*

- **Equitable Access:** Increase affordable access that meets the range of family needs, and prioritizes under-resourced groups and communities

*Goal 3:*

- **Families and Community Voice:** Elevate family and community voice to develop an equitable and responsive ECE system

*Goal 4:*

- **Systems and Funding:** Build a high-quality and well-funded ECE system that maximizes current resources, supports economically viable programs, and is poised to efficiently leverage future investment

**Goal 1: Workforce Objectives**

- **Objective 1A:** Invest in and promote policies that support the professional compensation of early childhood educators in centers, family child care homes, and schools

- **Objective 1B:** Pursue strategies that support worker recruitment and retention, and build education and training programs for skilled, diverse ECE educators and staff (e.g., apprenticeships, high school CDA, retraining from other fields)
- **Objective 1C:** Adopt a three-step career ladder that aligns with the Unifying Framework and links career advancement with compensation, following an implementation timeline and stakeholder input process that ensures any new system supports all providers
- **Objective 1D:** Create and expand successful strategies to support educators in increasing the quality of early childhood programs

### **Goal 2: Equitable Access Objectives**

- **Objective 2A:** Expand affordability for low- and middle-income families, committing to expanding Care 4 Kids eligibility to households earning up to 100% of State Median Income (SMI) over 3 years and phasing in a parent co-pay level of a maximum of 7% of family income (TBD)
- **Objective 2B:** Increase equitable access to high-quality programs to meet the needs of children and families, especially for infant/toddler care, children with special needs, and under-resourced families and communities (e.g., incentives for expanding infant and toddler slots, contracted infant and toddler slots, Smart Start, facility funding)

### **Goal 3: Family and Community Voice Objectives**

- **Objective 3A:** Recognize, empower, and embed families as central and valued decision-makers in the development of an equitable ECE system
- **Objective 3B:** Expand and fund community-informed governance with regional supports that utilizes a common needs assessment for an equitable and responsive ECE system

### **Goal 4: Systems and Funding Objectives**

- **Objective 4A:** Simplify state-funded system and better align with federal systems to reduce complexity and increase utility for providers, families, and the State
- **Objective 4B:** Assess true cost of quality care and develop a plan to transition to funding based on this true cost, starting with infant and toddler care, and high need communities
- **Objective 4C:** Maximize existing resources by strengthening programs and partnerships to improve enrollment, and reduce administrative burdens and redundant costs
- **Objective 4D:** Develop data and information systems, including a provider and parent portal, and navigation systems, to track and improve systems and outcomes
- **Objective 4E:** Develop a flexible fiscal model to support implementation, and help to prioritize and stage investments
- **Objective 4F:** Identify new funding streams that will support sustained and significant incremental investment in ECE

### Breakout Group 1:

- Workforce pathways clarity and support are needed
  - Look to the clear career pathways for public school educators, ensure levels are tied to compensation and clear definitions of responsibilities of that level
  - Roles are currently not distinctive – teachers' jobs in the classroom are the same regardless of education level; need to distinguish levels and job expectations
  - 3 step ladder needs to have more meaning and shorter paths
  - Ensure we find ways to get high school students to engage
  - Lost good professionals when CDA was no longer accepted
  - Ensure inclusion to allow those who don't want to get degrees to still be able to work, they may be ending careers and not be interested in getting a degree
  - Financial support for those who need funding to get degrees
- Workforce challenges need to be addressed – make profession more appealing
  - Teachers are understandably leaving to be paras in public schools with better pay and benefits; we need to consider equity with opportunities outside just the ECE lens (public schools, Amazon)
  - Currently not an attractive opportunity – more kids with challenges and less support for teachers to manage them
  - Consider a third person regularly in class to support (toilet training, behavioral challenges, allow for basic needs like going to the bathroom, etc.)
  - Consider specials programming for children, like music or arts for enrichment
  - Set up a pool of subs by area to lift the burden when teachers are sick or have to take leave
- Excited there is talk about equitable compensation
  - Other incentives may also make the position more appealing – affordable health care, transportation, grocery gift cards, proper break rooms
  - Consider transportation another aspect that impedes equity; allow funding to support bus passes for families and staff to be able to get to programs and around the community
- Need to meet changing families' needs
  - Support a system for allowing families to find what they need – can 211 continue to be the path for families to call? Need to ensure a system indicates hours, spaces, cost, eligibility; consider how parents communicate – social media
  - Consider shift workers as parents are working different schedules; how can we accommodate? Look at COVID approach for healthcare workers – i.e., have on-site child care run by professional ECE; is overnight care considered?
  - Many McKinney-Vento families and current immigrants bring new set of needs – additional funding needed to address (i.e., language needs, housing supports, etc.)

- Opportunity for PTAs to engage families deeper; ensure providers are aware of parent ambassadors – they could speak with parents at each center.; currently there is an awareness gap of who parent ambassadors are for each area
- Professional Development
  - Pool the ECE system to offer PD across the field; all ECE in areas can be invited; can bring together private and state funding for trainings
- Funding
  - Need equity across funding streams to broaden what you can use it for
  - School Readiness – get rid of three stool funding; open opportunity to get School Readiness with programs around where you work rather than where you live; need credible funding to cover each child; currently it’s the same money if you have a special needs kid, which makes it a challenge to support IDEA, but stay within a program and a budget
  - When funding is tied to a child, it can create challenges if children have to leave and then come back
  - Important to provide a flexible fiscal model aligned with the true cost of care
  - Account for the fact that food costs have gone up – for providers who provide any food, this is a big impact on funding

**Breakout Group 2:**

- Investment in educational opportunities for current administrative professionals (specifically grad school opportunities) to expound upon quality to ensure balance
- C4K
  - Disappointed in 100% State Median Income with a maximum parent co-pay of 7% – thought it would be higher, and it’s unclear if it’s both 100% SMI and 7% cap
  - Many centers don’t offer Care4 Kids, would be nothing for those families
  - If Care 4 Kids eligibility increases so everyone could apply and be approved, how would this impact the already existing waitlist? Turnaround time for approval is already 6 weeks, will it increase?
  - How to get families to apply for Care 4 Kids when they’re undocumented or don’t want to share information about their financial situation
  - Using AI technology to make it easier for families
  - Care 4 Kids sensitivity training for all staff
  - Care 4 Kids hours for families who work non-traditional hours or don’t work at all
- When capping cost for families, make sure it’s offset to support providers
- Excited to see that compensation is toward the top of the plan, but there are reservations about compensation tied to the Unifying Framework
  - There is worry about locking people into degrees to further their training, and stopping acknowledgement of other ways to expand training

- Questions on the plan to help business owners to subsidize pay increase: would this cause the owner to increase the tuition? Would centers have some type of plan where they would get a constant subsidy?
- Managing funding for food programs in areas where families are low-income, but the areas themselves are considered high-income
- Unsure of the structure of a community-informed governance, needs to be more clear and inclusive of who needs to be involved
- Excited about the Provider 360 Portal
- Interested in learning more about these new funding streams proposed, how they can be allocated
- Try to avoid the use of the word “tax,” and instead use words like “revenue generation,” “funding sources and streams”
- Try to avoid the use of the word “subsidy,” and instead use “voucher”
- Focus on how we spend money and how it will create incremental revenue
- Using tolls as a funding stream for early childhood
  - Look into alternative methods of funding (tobacco, gaming, etc.)
- Need more shared services
- Will state spots be expanded? Will educators be able to navigate these systems? How does the funding impact private centers?
- Focus on advocacy
- Need more focus on Parent Cabinet and local Early Childhood Collaboratives in this plan
- In terms of regional structures, look to our state’s health systems as a guide

### **Breakout Group 3:**

- Finding and retaining the right staff is one of my biggest challenges
- If you can find staff with credentials, they often lack motivation and experience
- A panel member jumped in with a question to the group: “Do you think it would be helpful for OEC to put out a marketing and recruitment toolkit?”
  - Yes, definitely
  - I don’t think we have a marketing problem; I think we have a staffing problem. Once I get someone through the door, they leave for more money. We pay to train them and then as soon as they are offered more money, they leave. What we have now are Band-Aids.
- Group feels the workforce budget needs to be its own line-item at the state level to support adequate pay; we need to figure out what other states are doing such as Vermont; what are other states who are doing this well? This needs to be its own funding stream – or a tax; these dollars would go to employee pay



- We also need to think about how funding impacts the larger privately owned centers such as Bright Horizons and KinderCare; current problem is that state funding does NOT apply to ALL child care; only those that qualify
- We know through surveys issued to our parents, that parents choose their child care based on trust and relationships. We are struggling with those employees in their 60s that don't have ECE qualifications. Does this mean we need to push them out? We could end up with all younger people who have never had children of their own or have the experience. We cannot push out people with experience to hire those with a degree.
- Equitable access is a major problem; there is already a waitlist problem; Care 4 Kids is a big problem and one that is far from being solved
- Look into untapped taxes in CT: cannabis and gaming
- Related to regional governance: there seems to be a lot of variation within the state already; we would need to know what the region is and what exactly would they do?
  - This seems to be another layer. There should be a 'needs' assessment; you need to engage 211 – that is your (OEC) child care system. Why are we adding another layer? You also need to capture this data at the point of entry.
- OEC says there are challenges within the 211 program; information and data is not up-to-date
  - We need to better understand what the specific family needs are
  - Benefit to this structure and a single-entry point; a parent can see at a glance where available opening is vs. making many calls. The negative is decisions are made further away from a community. The Parent Cabinet is not meeting with people in communities on the ground. Another layer is who and what communities get represented. Those that cannot show-up/attend don't get represented. The primary challenge is this 211 program set-up does not offer equitable access.
- A regional structure is different from a tool to manage a one point of entry system; we should not be confusing the two
- Privacy is a huge issue when asking families to input data; what assurances can we give to families and providers?
  - We do not need another tool – we need to take 211 that already exists and build that out; we need to stop adding layers
- Undocumented families won't want to enter information into a single point system that the government has access to
- We need a glossary in this plan; how are we defining an “underserved family”? What are the different streams of income?
- This report does not speak to the parents' primary concern, which is safety concerns

**Next Steps:**

Commissioner Bye thanked all participants for their attendance and feedback, and shared the timeline for reviewing and finalizing plan recommendations:





- Sept 20th: Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting to review outline and suggest revisions
- Sept 30th: Deadline for feedback on draft plan outline
- Nov 1st: Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting to review draft of final report contents
- Dec 6th: Blue Ribbon Panel submits plan to Governor's Office

Commissioner Bye encouraged people to use the online feedback link to provide any additional thoughts they may have.