

Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care
September 12, 2023 Sharing Session Minutes
Waterbury, Mattatuck Museum

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 presented the context of the Blue Ribbon Panel, its pillars, and the goals and objectives of the Outline.

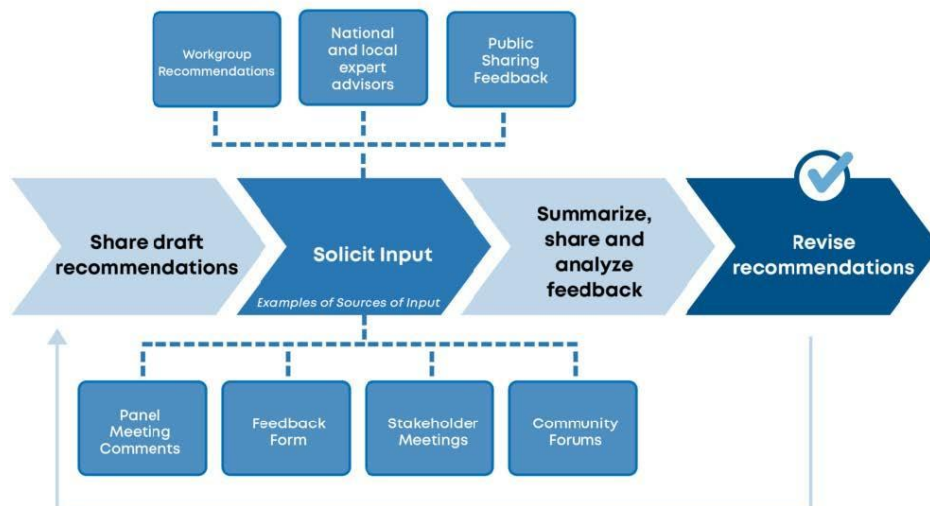
Blue Ribbon Panel Context:

The Charge to the Blue Ribbon Panel:

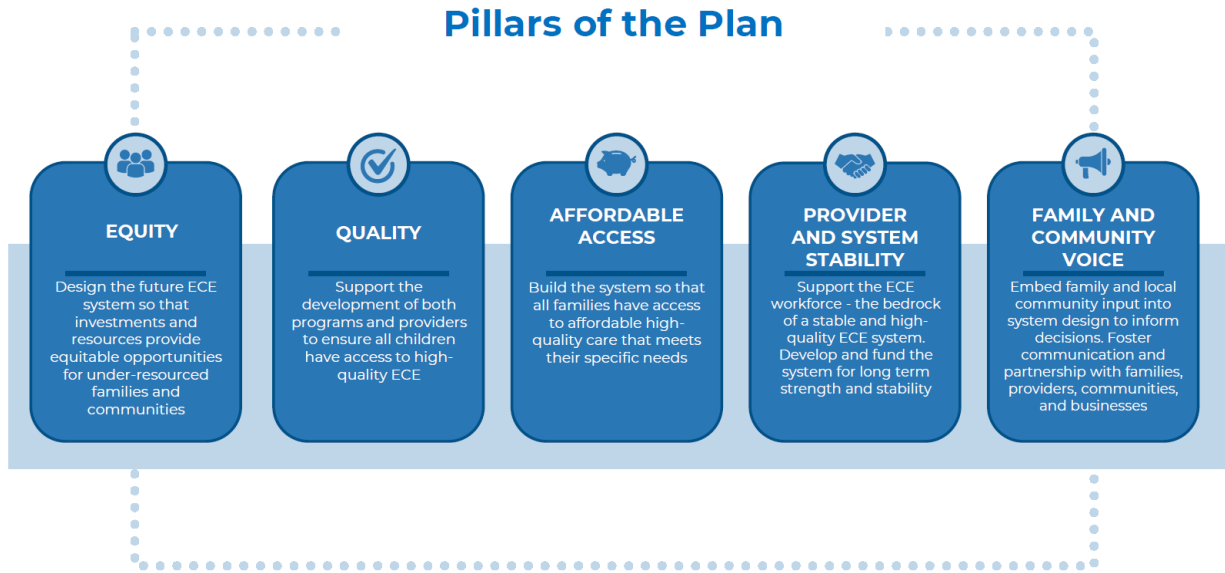
- The Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care was initiated by Governor Lamont’s Executive Order.
- The Panel is charged with developing a strategic plan for a child care system that works for families, providers, and Connecticut’s economy.
- The Panel will outline a data-driven, actionable, 5-year strategic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

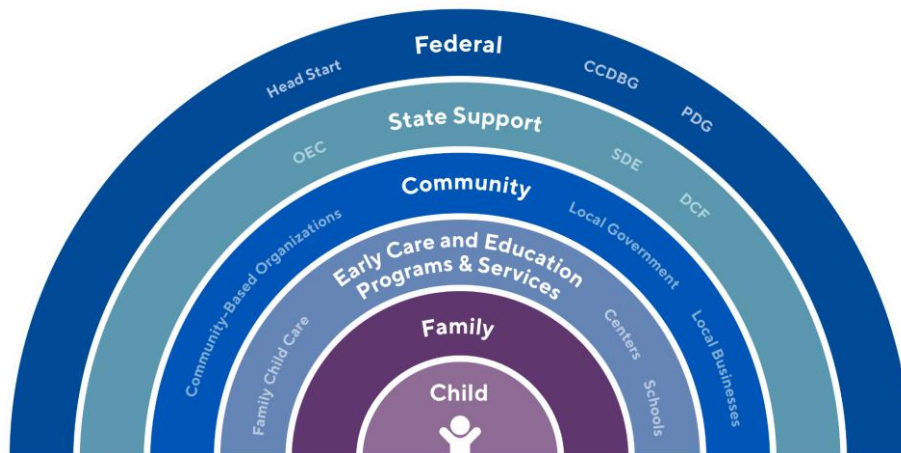


Draft Outline Review:



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 utilize 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:

- There's a struggle with staffing
 - Children are lined up and ready to join classrooms, but cannot find staff to teach
 - Compensation is the main issue with staffing
 - Compensation should align with the level of education
 - Students have heard that teaching is a difficult profession so they're not pushed toward pursuing the line of work; fewer and fewer people are entering the workforce
- Many providers are opting out of employer-provided healthcare plans because they qualify for Medicaid/HUSKY given their compensation
- Centers/employers bearing costs for staff to renew their CDA
 - Many providers don't renew their CDA because of the expense
 - There is a workaround to the expense by renewing on CTShares, but the application is so lengthy and the compensation is not seen as worth the effort to renew
- Across the State, there are vacancies in teaching positions causing for closures of centers/programs which is traumatic for communities in terms of child care
- Certain towns are disproportionately impacted by slots being open/filled because there is never an opportunity to get those slots back
- Look at a school year-based structure for School Readiness so centers and programs know how much money they're getting and they can budget appropriately, then evaluate at the end of the year to give them a lower number or sustain the original amount
- Look at the impact of COVID across different communities
- 70-80% of centers/programs do not have School Readiness, Child Day Care, or Care 4 Kids
- Ensure that while subsidized families are receiving support, non-subsidized families aren't feeling additional burden
- Access in creating slots for children infant/toddler age
 - If care was more affordable, a lot more children would be in care
 - Providing technical assistance of how to pay for that
 - Letting colleges know there will be a pipeline of well-paying jobs for future educators
- OEC Compensation schedule – needs to go up every year
- Need to address the new kindergarten age entry date for next school year
- Question of if there's funding available for the proposed wage model
- Need for support resources for children with special needs/autism
- Stressing the importance of simplifying funding streams and sources, and proceeding through contracts instead of grants
- Find a consistent funding stream/structure so there's no need to go to the legislature each year
- How will the regional ECE entities be developed?
 - Addressing the true cost of creating these regional systems
 - Flesh out how the regions would be put into place

- There's a level of concern of creating another level of bureaucracy that makes things more difficult
- Account for the indirect costs of child care
- Consideration of different types of funding spaces; they don't always meet the needs of the community (part-time/full-time)
- Community needs assessment: funding, who is completing those assessments, communities with councils/collaboratives versus those without
- Flexibility for funding
 - Centers/programs/schools can decide how to break it up
- Excited to see work being done to improve staff mental health and getting children back into preschool

Breakout Group 2:

- After school is primarily part-time; it is very difficult to find people who want to work from 3pm-6pm for minimum wage; agree that this is critical; perhaps a rent stipend other than just the strict compensation piece
- Supports for children with special needs; how we would be able to support these children within these spaces that work best for the child and the family
- Simplify the climbing ladder so that it is easy for people to have mobility within their careers, while also allowing them to stay in a position they like if they choose
- Families who get Care 4 Kids don't feel like they are getting a boost in income as they move up the career ladder as that is taken away in their Child Care costs increasing
- Make it more equitable for families that have limited access (limited transportation, language)
- Make more clear what are the pathways for people to become a teacher; we need to say that the work that you've done with us is a valued part of the system and you don't need to jump through these hurdles when you already have the credentials
- Confusion about what we call the roles – what are some general roles that we can unpack that helps people see where they fit; people should be able to also stay in the position that they're in
- The home day care providers may be interested, but they may be limited by capacity (consider hybrid opportunities for earning certification or degrees during times that they would be available)
- What are the considerations for pay levels? There is a compensation schedule – the top tier would be the equivalent of a public school teacher's salary; that would end up being a 50% increase in salary
- We're going to need to figure out what are the funding streams (other states are using cannabis for early childhood funding)
- Nothing about home-based child care – this is something a lot of minority communities use

- How do we support child care providers that want to stay in this field but don't have the salaries that they need to stay? What does retention look like for people who are in different stages of this career?
- Create an easy/hybrid method in getting staff into free classes because they are often working multiple jobs
- How do we make certifying qualified teachers easier and equitable for these workers?
- Interested in support or services/schools for children with special needs; what will be added to that to increase the support we provide them? Where are the gaps?
- Each situation is very different and it may not be the most supportive thing for a child if this is not the proper or best support
- Is there any conversation on housing security? Friends Center has partnered with the Yale School of Management to supply housing, 3 family housing, and building more that will end up supplying 10 educators that will have housing provided; this is rent-free; meet with a financial literacy consultant once a month to achieve financial goals; no limit in how long they can participate; this is one way to look into housing
- Number one need when speaking with educators is finding housing
- More clarification on health insurance; more mental health support for educators; having someone in the centers that people can speak to; Friends Center has these resources in hand
- A parent group that would be able to do professional development training; there are a lot of parent groups – is this a space for them to lean in?
- Like the idea of one single State-funded program; these different regulations are a stressor and cause more confusion; the paperwork can be daunting
- Consider having a benefits calculator – families know even less about this than providers do, so this would be super helpful for them; this is the precursory – what a family needs to know, where's that info, where's that support, how much does it cost?
- A lot of the families that we deal with because of our region, live in rural areas; there's a huge need in these areas because there are child care centers, but there's no way to tell if you'll be able to keep it going; we need to reach these areas; there are all kinds of resources that are missing within these areas
- Want to provide the same resources that children with special needs receive during the school day to continue after school; it's also very hard for families to access both educational needs and special needs programs that work
- We have parents that access child care through a lottery and this child care service may be further than where they live; how do we prevent further transitions that would hinder the babies?
- Excited about the talks about the cannabis profits to use for early childhood education within Connecticut

- Getting the support for the children and staff, funds, for families that have special needs; there's nowhere for them to go outside of the daycare; they are denied going to certain things because of the needs that they have

Breakout Group 3:— Mix of English and Spanish Speakers

In the breakout session: Introductions took place. A combination of new and seasoned providers were present-2 years to 18 years, OEC staff and consultants, and a union representative.

What resonates with you?

I like the idea of high school recruitment-it is a struggle to find assistants and/or substitutes. Difficult to find qualified and committed staff. This has been a struggle for years.

There is no pool of substitutes available.

\$15 per hour with no benefits makes it difficult to find help. Providers also don't have health insurance and benefits.

Bus services for children to family child care homes are needed.

Helping parents with 100% of their Care 4 Kids parent fee - no parent co-pay is needed.

Likes that the plan is also thinking about the 7% cap for families.

There are families that are undocumented - what help or support can be provided to them.

Also consider the language barriers for providers - support for professional development needed.

Offering professional development in person not just virtually, ensure providers receive certificates. An easier process for sharing certificates/data with the OEC. Providers may not have access to computers, IPADs, IT.

Are there any recommendations that you feel that you feel need more consideration or clarification?

Book/resources say something but the licensing inspector says something else - clarification on inspections

More information on the Unified Framework.

What is the plan? What do we as providers do with it?

Invest in Head Start and the Head Start model across the State.

Which recommendations are you most excited about?

Anything you didn't hear?

Insurance for health care providers. It is very expensive. Co-pays are expensive. When we get sick and don't go to the doctor due to the cost. Ex. A Provider flying to her home country to receive care.

A retirement plan for providers.

Invest in the profession. Providers have no benefits whatsoever.

What is quality care? How is it being defined? We need a definition.

Discussion Break 2

What resonates with you?

Providers having one place to find information that we need.

More funding to provide services for the children and their families.

When the cost of living goes up - we are very far where we should be. Also, many families do not qualify for subsidies.

How are parents asked to provide feedback on the BRB? Provider shared that her parents do not know about the BRB.

What is included in the BRB long term for engaging parents and including parent voice?

One provider shared this opportunity to with her Provider Chat group to get providers here tonight. We are learning about the BRB and the provider will share this information with her families to get engaged.

Increase the capacity of the number of children that we can have in the programs, taking into consideration the provider's space and health and safety. Other states have a higher ratio. CT has more regulations than other states and we are paid less.

How to elevate parent voice - educate them and provide space for families to share their feedback. Eliminate barriers to participation-days/times that work for families, offer opportunities in different languages, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Albanian.

Sometimes parents may leave off information on applications because they are afraid, they may not qualify. Some see the OEC and State agencies in a bad light. This provider supports the families in her program with completing applications - she speaks their language; they have trouble finding help.

For parents to be included in the meetings - provide their email address to learn about meetings.

Ask parents to go to an orientation - what is the OEC, what is child care?

A seasoned provider serving a child with a disability receiving Care 4 Kids, mom has a co-pay. Provider is requesting additional support . Not enough additional funding from Care 4 Kids for serving a child with a disability.

Are there any recommendations that you feel that you feel need more consideration or clarification?

Which recommendations are you most excited about?

Anything you didn't hear?

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.