

Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care
September 14, 2023 Sharing Session Minutes
Virtual

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.

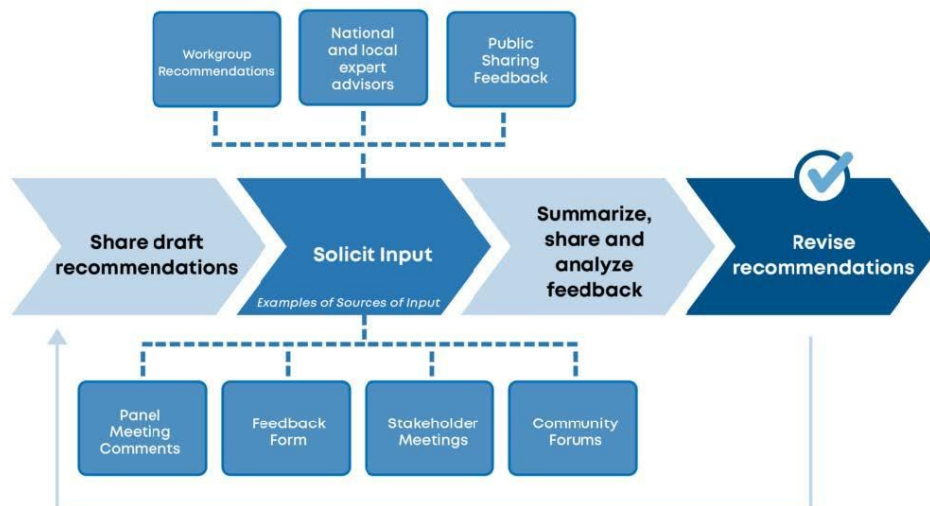
Blue Ribbon Panel Context:

The Charge to the Blue Ribbon Panel:

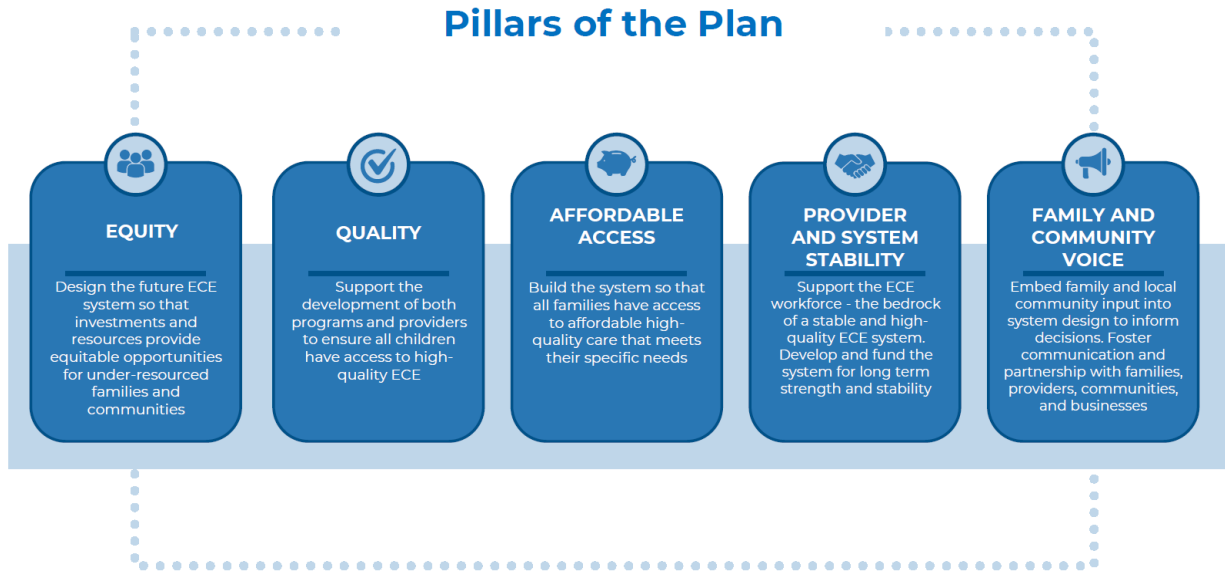
- The Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care was initiated by Governor Lamont’s Executive Order.
- The Panel is charged with developing a strategic plan for a child care system that works for families, providers, and Connecticut’s economy.
- The Panel will outline a data-driven, actionable, 5-year strategic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

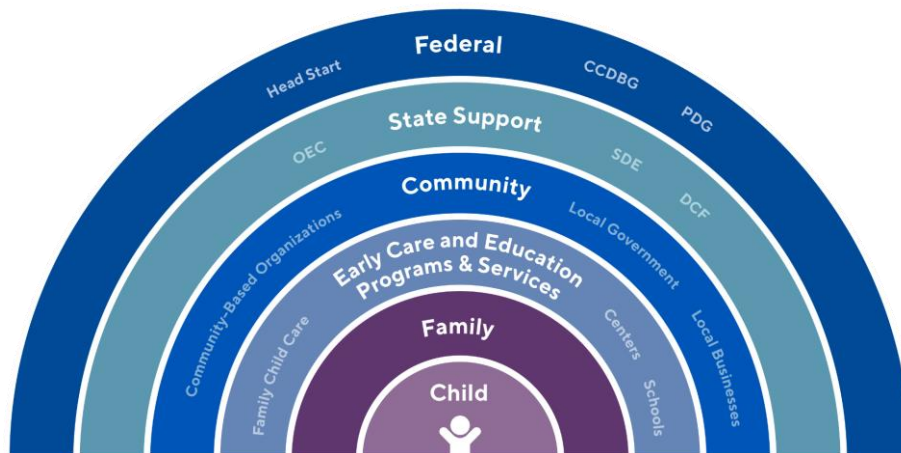


Draft Outline Review:



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:

- This plan enforces support of the field from the OEC and makes all types of centers/providers feel like a team
- Concern over bringing back the CDA – need to focus on what’s already in place instead (certificates, [a](#)Associate degree programs to push students to obtain their [b](#)Bachelor’s degree and [m](#)Master's degree)
 - CDAs can be a stepping stone for a lot of new providers
 - Have to be cautious of what we’re asking of the field – experience/skill may outweigh level of degree – perhaps explore Lab School or hands-on experience as an alternative
- It’s difficult to define what “high quality” is
- There’s a surge in a need to provide for students with special/behavioral needs
- The field has changed since the COVID pandemic
 - Need to look back at the books, and re-train the staff and the methodology
- Provide mentors and support for those just getting out of high school to guide them and help them achieve their goals
 - Especially in terms of scholarships and navigating progressing their education – it’s difficult to work through as a beginner
- It was noted that with any system there needs to be a learning process and time is needed for the field to catch up
 - Recognized that with new systems come new trainings and benchmarks for success
 - BCIS and ECE Reporter as examples
 - Having smaller [BCIS training](#) sessions with providers to work through questions and know the responses would be beneficial during trainings
- Have all “systems” funneled through one location – it can be time consuming to make sure all the administrative work has been completed – having one location with a tracker might make this easier
- Would like to hear more on new money for public schools and Smart Start expansion, no new money for School Readiness or CDC expansion
 - 5-year plan to increase the payments
- Looking for more communication to communities/families from the decision makers, feeling that communities/families aren’t being reached out to/looped in
- Question on thoughts of how to provide increased wages for staff in non-State sponsored programs?

Breakout Group 2:

- Challenge from a parent of an ECE worker – need to address discrimination against teachers who have disabilities (specific example was epilepsy) and allow for accommodations to keep qualified teachers in classrooms

- From the higher education perspective, more students are looking toward primary or secondary education careers due to compensation; need to understand the true cost of care to allow for funding to accommodate needs of teachers and children; community-based programs who do not receive State funding are unable to compete with other employment opportunities to keep staff
- Pay teachers to complete [Care 4 Kids4K](#) training – taking 18 or even 5 hours out of the classroom is a lot and even more challenging when you cannot afford a substitute; need to be able to pay and certify teachers before the 90-day period
- Consider housing as an important part related to recruitment and retention of staff
- Consider regional professional development – can we create a system of professional development that is offered directly from the State rather than individual programs putting [them](#) on?
- Support a 1 point of entry system; this could create equity and access
 - Can become a tool for parents and providers, and source of data collection
 - Suggestion to create an opt out system so children are entered at birth and data collection can start
- Infant and toddler shortage
 - Would rather see the promise of fewer number of infant and toddler slots [at](#) a true cost of care
 - 4-to-1 ratio means that these spots are 2x as expensive – the State needs to be able and willing to offer funding based on the level of staffing it requires
- Reaction to funding proposal
 - \$30 million is too low to make an impact
 - [Care 4 Kids4K](#) funding will not be enough to support the changes that need to be made across the whole field; just increasing funding within State-funded programs is NOT enough; OEC can't say it is a system for ALL when it is only a recommendation for some
 - Changes to [Care 4 Kids 4K](#) are good, but 100% SMI is too low based on real costs of care
 - Consider funding related to benefits packages or one-time investments, such as rent or insurance – the dual impact is that if the State was paying for those costs, then providers could shift those saved dollars into teacher salary
 - Don't forget to consider communities in the middle, that are not considered high risk and not affluent enough to provide all services
- Education qualifications considerations
 - Support the focus on the workforce; the unifying framework 3 levels would be helpful if it aligns with compensation
 - Wonderful to educate our teachers, but concerned about creating more obstacles or limiting who can teach what based on certifications; do not block good people because of qualifications; we need alternate groups

- Ensure certifications and training around qualifications are around things that families and children will benefit from
- Ensure qualifications are attainable and that compensation ~~that~~ matches qualifications
- 100% behind the idea of a compensation scale aligned with public school, but puts a burden on centers who would already be doing this if they had the funding – it requires other routes of revenue to support this
- Family child care providers shared their experience of receiving various degrees and wanting compensation that aligns with the high quality care
- Need to look at governance of what would support a regional approach with consideration to how school readiness works differently across different communities
 - Provider expressed reservations about another layer around regional structure; need to clarify that it is not adding another layer, but creating support for existing systems that are not functioning correctly; adding another layer will not solve dysfunction in the system
- What happens if the political winds change? Funding needs to be secure – none of this will happen if we do not have a new funding stream; it needs to be identified and have very clear parameters that are not touchable
 - Need to expand funding in creative ways – “I would drive over any bridge that’s toll went to support ECE providers’ compensation.”
 - Need a true cost of care study – which has been needed for 30 years
- Workforce opportunities
 - Look to high schools to engage students in the pathway into ECE
 - Provide pathways for those in the field to provide technical assistance and be compensated for it; ensure equitable expansion of TA providers (needs to include multilingual providers)
- “How do we get people to see social good?” – can the BRP include some marketing and awareness campaign dollars for this purpose?

Breakout Group 3:

- *Group 3’s notetaker to insert in here*

Breakout Group 4 (main room):

- I am super excited about workforce development being a focus; going back to wage supports, compensation and developmental goals go hand-in-hand, and we need to look at a big picture; fair wages do not mean that these wages are livable – especially in this area; I hope the focus will remain on this; we want to incentivize teachers to want to grow and develop; we want them to be proud and be able to make a livable wage; right now, this is not happening
- I have some excitement around the efforts for workforce and wages; for consideration, if we are looking at equitable access, I want to invite thinking around the new legislative policy that is

changing the age for kindergarten; there may need to be more space available for those children that will not enter kindergarten until a full year later; where are these older children going to go?

- Are there any thoughts on expanding the numbers in a classroom in an older child's room? Then you can increase capacity; can the ratio change?
- To the point of kindergarten, if parents have a child born in the fall that will be 3 and entering preschool, parents are now waiting so they don't have 3 years of preschool; this is a problem because there will be another gap; we don't want these parents waiting
- Under equitable access – extending affordability will be fabulous for a family, especially in matching the 7%; on the flip side, is there conversation around the details to make sure the [Care 4 Kids4K](#) payment and Head Start funding reimbursement rates also get bumped? I need more clarification on that
 - o My concern on the 7% piece – the SMI number is a better number to use; the SMI is still not high enough; if we are committed to having our communities thrive, it needs to be more; for those that make a higher wage, 7% is helpful, but those that are not, it's not high enough
- I get many calls from people looking for child care; they are struggling to find space; this means they are given to their grandparents; the grandparents are not skilled or trained in teaching; they are giving them iPads for hours and hours throughout the day; the list is too long for [Care 4 Kids4K](#) and parents cannot afford when there is space; parents are choosing to stay home and lean on the state vs. going to work
- This is very exciting; I love the idea of building a comprehensive system; we want to accommodate families, but we also need to protect the providers; if parents would like grandparents to take children for a day, that's great, but we need to find a way where providers are covered for payment; this needs to be flexible
- I have a question about the funding stream; I'm a little worried about relying on private business for a decent percentage of funding; I don't want this to go in the direction of medicine; this should be a business model; it could narrow accessibility even more
- I really love the idea of keeping the small community feel; I don't want big private businesses bumping fees and dictating curriculum
- I worry about regionalism; CT is very much 169 individual towns; we do them scattered here in CT; It doesn't work well here; if we move to this approach, it will hurt small towns
- Currently this plan has too much focus on infants and toddlers; we need to remember this plan needs to reflect infants to 5

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.