

***A Report to Meet the Requirements of Section 144 of Public Act 11-61:
A Plan to Coordinate School Readiness and Child Day Care Programs***

“One of the other ways we can close the achievement gap is by giving every child in this state – irrespective of their family’s income – a chance to have a pre-kindergarten learning experience. Too many of our children today don’t get that chance, meaning they are simply too often not ready to learn when they begin school. Which means they’re behind before they even get started....as Governor, I’d like to do the same for every child in the State. While we don’t have the money to do that today, we do have the money to make a down payment on that dream.”

Governor Dannel P. Malloy

February 16, 2011, Budget Address to the General Assembly

Background

When Governor Malloy took office in January 2011, he faced a record budget deficit. Despite this deficit, the Governor did not ignore the importance of early childhood education, particularly for the thousands of Connecticut children birth through age 8 who face daily barriers to healthy development and academic success. At a time when state financial resources were particularly limited, Governor Malloy courageously recommended significant new investments in early childhood learning and development programs. These investments, coupled with structural and organizational changes, will help to eliminate the barriers created by disconnected programs and services across multiple agencies.

Early childhood education represents a critical element in Governor Malloy’s plan towards education reform in our state. Too often, low-income and high-need children have not benefitted from access to high-quality early learning environments that adequately prepare them for school success. Connecticut’s investments will serve to enhance high-quality early learning and development programs, ensuring that more high-need children will arrive at school with critical foundational skills. A future workforce demands competent and skilled individuals who are prepared to engage in a global economy. High-quality early learning and development programs will help to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to graduate from high school career and college ready.

As a step toward creating a coordinated system of early learning and development, Section 144 of Public Act 11-61 (see Attachment A) requires the development of a plan to coordinate child day care services administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the school readiness programs administered by the Department of Education (SDE) into a coordinated early care and education program. The plan shall address program eligibility, slot rates and program requirements and make recommendations to maintain the mission and integrity of child care services. The plan is due to the General Assembly and Governor Malloy by January 1, 2012.

Planning Process

In order to meet the requirements of PA 11-61, a study group was convened to include representatives from the SDE, DSS, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), early childhood learning and development providers, and an early childhood advocacy group (see Attachment B). While focused on the requirements of PA 11-61, the study group also considered other early childhood legislation and developments including PA 11-181 (see Attachment C). Therefore many of the recommendations go beyond the required elements and address issues related to state and local governance for a coordinated system of early learning and development.

At its first meeting on July 29, 2011, the group adopted a set of principles to guide discussions and recommendations¹. These principles are as follows:

- put children and families first;
- be flexible and accountable;
- balance access, affordability, quality and coordination/continuity of care;
- prioritize the needs of low-income families;
- build on the strengths of the current system, minimize weaknesses, maximize resources;
- value input from staff and stakeholders;
- keep interested parties informed; and
- provide timely and comprehensive information.

Summary of PA 11-61 Requirements and Study Group Recommendations

As a result of extensive discussion, document review and analyses occurring over the course of eight regularly scheduled meetings, the study group recommends that instead of two separate systems (School Readiness and Child Day Care) there be a single Early Learning CONNections (ELC) system. The study group has also come to consensus on the following set of recommendations. These recommendations will continue to be informed and evolved by new members of the leadership team, including the State's new Education Commissioner and the to-be-hired Planning Director.

A. Service Eligibility

This ELC system shall serve a diverse population of children birth to age 8. Participation shall not be limited by place of residence, race, ethnicity, religion, culture, abilities or native language. Geographic focus may be pursued as a strategy. The programs shall encourage parent/guardian employment; in the aggregate, each program shall have a minimum of 60 percent of eligible children with at least one parent/guardian who work or are enrolled in an approved training program or in school.

¹ Adapted from [A Case Study of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care](#). Rennie Center, 2008

Children ages 8 to 12 currently participating in the school-age childcare programs formerly administered by DSS will be grandfathered into this new system. The SDE has historically taken a leadership role in developing a vision for high-quality after-school programs. These programs are designed to offer students academic/educational enrichment and recreational activities in Grades K-12 that are designed to reinforce and complement the regular academic program of participating students. The SDE will develop a plan to ensure that children ages 8 through 12 will have access to academic enrichment and activities. These programs will also help working parents by providing a safe environment for students.

B. Slot (Space) Rates and Program Funding (this refers to parent fees for services)

Early learning and development programs shall strive for fiscal and administrative sustainability. The state shall provide funds to support fiscal sustainability with the understanding that communities and families have responsibility to support the ELC system.

ELC programs shall be funded for a five-year period. Starting in FY 2014, application processes shall begin the transition to this five-year funding cycle. Funding may be awarded using a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process that requires applicants to meet standards set by SDE. Funding for ELC programs shall be granted by SDE to a designated fiduciary, determined by the town, for distribution to programs. The fiduciary shall fund programs in a timely manner.

There shall be one uniform sliding fee scale developed for parents participating in the ELC system. There shall be a set fee for each child participating in the program. The fees may differentiate based on child age, family size and income with flexibility for hardship cases. Fee rates for each child shall be set annually unless there is a drastic change in family circumstances warranting a mid-year adjustment.

C. Program Requirements to Ensure Quality

The most important recommendations with respect to the ELC system address universal program quality. The SDE shall ensure that all ELC programs serving children birth through age 8 will be high quality and will meet and maintain National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation, Head Start, or other specifically selected system of accreditation or approval requirements. Curricula, teaching and assessment practices shall be based on the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (being developed in collaboration with the Governor's Early Childhood Education Cabinet). Child outcome measures used by ELC programs shall be aligned to these standards. All programs shall participate in ongoing and continuous program improvement and meet teacher-credentialing requirements as specified in PA 11-54 (SB 927.) Such teacher credentialing requirements will continue to be reviewed by the SDE in collaboration with DSS and other partners in the context of overall certification reform analysis and reform.

D. Maintain Mission of DSS Child Care Program

Originally an income security program for working parents, this program will continue to have a focus on working families, with a requirement that at least 60 percent of children come from families where a parent/guardian is working, enrolled in an approved training program, or in school. In addition, the mission of the coordinated system should include positive developmental outcomes for children and families. These outcomes can only be reached if programs are designed and implemented to strengthen family support services aimed at the overall health and well-being of our youngest learners in the state.

E. Governance

Though not a requirement of PA 11-61, the study group believes it is important to address governance as part of the new system for early care and development. The ELC requires a robust and coordinated infrastructure. Utilizing state, local, and philanthropic resources; active collaboration between community-based and public school programs; and effective marketing to promote enrollment of a diverse population shall be its basic tenets. At the state and municipal level, there shall be a commitment to partnerships with local collaborative councils. These councils will serve as a mechanism to break down the barriers between programs and services delivered by various funding streams. Municipalities will be expected to maintain a stable and capable system to support and engage councils. The state shall monitor and provide technical assistance to local councils.

Local ELC Councils shall be responsible for:

- Developing and monitoring the implementation of an early learning strategic plan regarding education, health and support for family engagement². This plan shall include collaborative strategies for sharing an individual child's progress between early learning development programs and schools serving the primary grades (K-3). The plan shall also include programs and settings such as licensed home day care and family, friends and neighbors.
- Coordinating efficient and effective use of resources, collecting and analyzing relevant data and completing required reports to SDE.

Liaisons shall serve to communicate and coordinate among towns, regions, and the state. Roles and responsibilities shall be defined specifically to focus on the purpose of the ELC system including, but not limited to, supporting a monitoring and data collection system,

² http://www.wcgmf.org/documents/doc_12.pdf

coordinating resources for the councils, and working closely with the state to facilitate application processes, communication, and regional work.

Program and fiscal management shall remain at the state level with oversight for the coordination, administration, and monitoring of the ELC councils, liaisons, and programs. The state shall deliver prospective funds quarterly to the town-designated fiduciary that shall immediately dispense funds to each ELC program.

Next Steps

While the study group did not address steps to implement the recommendations, it is important to begin articulating implementation, particularly as these recommendations relate to PA 11-181. The recommendations in the plan outline a pathway for the development of an early care and education system. In the short term, the SDE's integration of the former DSS child day care programs with School Readiness programs will provide direction to the larger efforts necessary to attain a coordinated, efficient and effective early childhood system. Additional efforts must consider the use of other state and federal resources, including the DSS Care-4-Kids funds to maximize programs' and families' commitment to a quality system of services for young children and their families. For example, it may be possible to provide Care-4-Kids subsidies at a higher rate to families who choose programs that are at a higher tier of quality as part of a system of quality rating and improvement.

The development of a tiered quality rating and improvement system for early learning programs is an integral component of a coordinated system to guarantee quality programs and services to all children. Parents and guardians deserve to know if they are sending their child to a high-quality program and the outcomes that can be expected regarding their child's development.

Conclusion

A 13-member study group comprised of representatives from the SDE, DSS, OPM, early childhood learning and development providers, and an early childhood advocacy group met eight times over the course of five months to address the requirements of Section 144 of Public Act 11-61. This Act required the development of a plan to coordinate child day care services administered by DSS and the school readiness programs administered by SDE into a coordinated early care and education programs.

The recommendations put forth in this report came about through a collaborative process including research on current policy and practice, dialogue with stakeholders, surveys and presentations from local councils. A detailed description of each component and further delineation of processes shall be developed as part of implementation guidance once the final plan is approved and supporting legislation is in place.

The recommendations to coordinate school readiness and child day care are an initial step toward creating a coordinated system of early learning and development.

Attachment A: A Summary of PA 11-61, Section 144³

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE REVENUE ITEMS IN THE BUDGET AND MAKING BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS, DEFICIENCY APPROPRIATIONS, CERTAIN REVISIONS TO BILLS OF THE CURRENT SESSION AND MISCELLANEOUS CHANGES TO THE GENERAL STATUTES

Sec. 144. Section 186 of public act 11-48 is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2011):

The Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Social Services, shall develop a plan to coordinate child day care services administered by the Department of Social Services offered as part of a school readiness program into and the school readiness programs administered by the Department of Education into a coordinated early care and education program. Such plan shall address program eligibility, slot rates and program requirements and make recommendations to maintain the mission and integrity of child care services pursuant to section 8-210b of the general statutes. The Departments of Education and Social Services shall report, not later than January 1, 2012, to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and human services and to the Governor. [Not later than July 1, 2012, the Commissioner of Education shall submit such plan, with any findings and recommendations, to the Governor.]

³ Office of Legislative Research, Public Act Summaries, 2011

Attachment B: Members of the Early Childhood Education Study Group

Co-Chairs:

- *Harriet Feldlaufer, Chief, Bureau of Teaching and Learning, State Department of Education*
- *Kathleen S. Guay, State Department of Education*

Members:

- *Maggie Adair, Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance*
- *George A. Coleman, former Deputy Commissioner of Education*
- *Susan Corrice, Finance Director, Riverfront Children's Center*
- *Monette Ferguson, Director of Early Learning, ABCD, Inc., Bridgeport*
- *Leah Grenier, Principal Budget Specialist, Office of Policy and Management*
- *Deborah Monahan, Executive Director, Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc.*
- *David Morgan, Vice President of TEAM, Inc.*
- *John Noonan, Fiscal and Program Policy Director, Office of Policy and Management*
- *Peter Palermino, Program Manager, Bureau of Assistance Programs, Department of Social Services*
- *Caty Patton, Budget Analyst, Office of Policy and Management*
- *Kathleen M. Queen, Executive Director, Wallingford Community Day Care Center, Inc., Co-Chair, State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum*

*Additional support and technical assistance provided by SDE Education Consultants:
Deborah Adams, Michelle Levy and Gerri Rowell*

Attachment C: A Summary of PA 11-181—sSB 1103⁴

AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COORDINATED SYSTEM OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY: This act creates, by July 1, 2013, a coordinated system of early care and education and child development (i.e., “system”). It requires the governor, by July 15, 2011 to appoint a planning director within the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to develop a plan to implement the system. The act lists the system's duties and the things the planning director must consider in developing the implementation plan. It requires various state agencies to help him or her develop the plan.

It (1) requires the system to collaborate with local and regional early childhood councils to implement the system at the local level and (2) lists the childhood council's duties in the collaboration.

It requires the planning director to report to the Early Childhood Education Cabinet and several legislative committees, at various times, on the progress in planning and implementing the system.

The act eliminates the State Department of Education's (SDE) Office of Early Childhood Planning, Outreach and Coordination and all of its duties.

It also changes the membership of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet and expands it from 17 to 20.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2011

§ 3 — EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM PLANNING DIRECTOR

The act requires the governor to appoint, in consultation with the early childhood cabinet, a planning director within OPM to plan and develop the system. The appointment must be made (1) within available appropriations or funded by donations from private sources or federal funds and (2) by July 15, 2011.

§ 3 — SYSTEM PLAN

The director must develop a plan for the system that consolidates existing early childhood education and child care programs and services for children from birth to age eight into a coordinated system that attempts to:

⁴ Office of Legislative Research, Public Act Summaries, 2011

1. reduce the academic achievement gap;
2. increase participation in early childhood education programs;
3. increase parent engagement, family literacy, and parenting skills;
4. increase oral language development and social competence;
5. decrease special education placements; and
6. support parents and guardians of young children on finding and retaining employment and encourage such parents and guardians to attend work training programs.

Consolidation may include school readiness programs, Head Start, the family resource center program established in law, child care facilities, state-contracted child care center program guidelines, the birth-to-three program, professional development activities relating to early childhood education, and any other relevant early childhood programs and services.

The act requires the planning director, when developing the plan, to:

1. consider opportunities for inter- and intra-agency consolidation to reduce redundancy and improve the focus on positive outcomes for children and families;
2. provide for the creation of memoranda of agreement (MOA) between the coordinated system and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations;
3. identify opportunities to align services and meet the holistic needs of children and families;
4. implement an accountability framework to measure program and service outcomes;
5. identify common requirements for funding from various sources and identify waiver provisions related to these requirements that can be used to improve service delivery in the state;
6. identify barriers under state or federal law that inhibits effective consolidation of functions or use of interagency agreements;
7. consult with qualified local and regional planning groups; and
8. focus the MOA to relevant program areas, such as maternal and child health, literacy, family support, financial planning, and early care and education.

For purposes of the system plan development, the planning director may enter into a MOA with and accept donations from nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

The departments of Education, Social Services (DSS), Public Health (DPH), Children and Families (DCF), Developmental Services, and Higher Education must help the director plan and develop the system.

§ 2 — EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

The act creates, by July 1, 2013, a coordinated system of early care and education and child development that must consist of comprehensive and aligned policies, responsibilities, practices, and services for young children and their families, including prenatal care and care for children from birth to age eight to ensure optimal health, safety, and learning for each child. The policies, practices, and services must be in accordance with the plan the planning director develops under the act.

This system must:

1. create a unified set of reporting requirements for (a) school readiness; (b) Head Start; (c) family resource centers; (d) child care programs, facilities, and licensing; (e) the Birth to Three program; (f) professional development activities relating to early childhood education; and (g) other relevant early childhood programs and services, in order to collect data necessary for quality assessments and longitudinal analysis;
2. compare and analyze the data collected in (1) above with the data collected in the statewide public school information system for population-level analysis of children and families;
3. develop and update (a) appropriate early learning standards and assessment tools for children from birth to age five that are age and developmentally appropriate and aligned with existing learning standards as of July 1, 2013 and (b) assessment tools for students in Grades kindergarten to 12;
4. monitor and evaluate all early childhood education and child care programs and services, focusing on program outcomes in satisfying the health, safety, developmental, and educational needs of all children;
5. develop indicators that assess strategies designed to strengthen the family through parental involvement in a child's development and education, including children with special needs;
6. increase the availability of early childhood education and child care programs and services and encourage providers to work together to create options that allow families to participate in programs that serve individual needs;
7. provide information and technical assistance to people seeking such programs and services;
8. help state agencies and municipalities obtain available federal funding for early childhood education and child care programs and services;

9. provide technical assistance and consultation to licensed providers of early childhood education and child care programs and services and help any potential provider obtain licensure and certification;
10. create, implement, and maintain a quality rating and improvement system that covers home-based, center-based, and school-based early child care and learning;
11. maintain an accreditation system to help early childhood education and child care programs and services achieve national standards and improve the programs;
12. create partnerships between state agencies and philanthropic organizations to help implement the system;
13. align the system's policy and program goals with those of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet and the Head Start advisory committee;
14. ensure a coordinated and comprehensive statewide system of professional development for providers of early childhood education and child care programs and services;
15. develop family-centered services that assist families in their communities;
16. provide families with opportunities to choose services, including quality child care;
17. integrate early childhood education and special education services;
18. emphasize targeted research-based interventions;
19. organize services into a coherent system;
20. coordinate a comprehensive and accessible delivery system for early childhood education and child care services;
21. focus on performance measures to ensure that services are accountable, effective, and accessible to the consumer;
22. promote universal access to early childhood care and education;
23. ensure non-duplication of monitoring and evaluation;
24. encourage, promote, and coordinate funding to establish and administer local and regional early childhood councils that implement local and regional birth-to-eight systems; and
25. perform any other activities to assist in providing early childhood education and child care programs and services.

§ 2 — SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION

The act requires the system to collaborate with local and regional early childhood councils to implement the system at the local level.

The early childhood councils must:

1. develop and implement a comprehensive plan for an early childhood system for the community the council serves;
2. develop policy and program planning;
3. encourage community participation by emphasizing substantial parental involvement;
4. collect, analyze, and evaluate data focusing on program and service outcomes;
5. allocate resources; and
6. perform any other functions to help provide early childhood programs and services.

The early childhood councils may enter into MOAs with the local or regional school readiness council of the town or region the early childhood council serves to perform the duties and functions of a school readiness council. If no such local or regional school readiness council exists for the town or region of such early childhood council, the early childhood council may perform the duties and functions that a local readiness council would perform.

The system may enter into MOAs with and accept donations from nonprofit and philanthropic organizations to implement the system at the local level.

§ 3 — REPORTING ON PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

The act imposes various reporting requirements on the planning director. From October 1, 2011 to July 1, 2013, the planning director must report quarterly to the early childhood cabinet. The report may include:

1. recommendations on agency consolidation to improve coordination within the system;
2. suggestions on how to combine federal, state, and local resources to maximize system efficiencies and outcomes for children and families;
3. suggestions to improve the coordination of state and local early childhood education initiatives to provide holistic, affordable, high quality, early education for young children;
4. recommendations for system improvements; and

5. assurances that the statutory guidelines for state-contracted child care center programs are being preserved in the planning and development of the coordinated system.

From January 1, 2012, to July 1, 2013, the planning director must semiannually report to the Appropriations, Human Services, and Education committees. The report may include the same items listed above for quarterly reports to the early childhood cabinet.

By January 30, 2013, the planning director must report to the Appropriations, Human Services, and Education committees with recommendations on which department should serve as the lead agency and where the staff of the coordinated system should be located.

§ 4 — AGENCIES BASED IN THE SDE

The act requires the early childhood cabinet, director of the Connecticut Head Start Collaboration Office, Head Start advisory committee, and Accreditation Facilitation Project of Connecticut Charts-A-Course to be based in the SDE for purposes of (1) system planning and development and (2) working with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

§ 5 — OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PLANNING ELIMINATED

The act eliminates the Office of Early Childhood Planning and its duty to:

1. plan, develop, and coordinate, with other agencies, the delivery of services to children from birth to age nine;
2. coordinate the implementation of an Early Childhood Education Information System capable of tracking numerous elements of school readiness programs and the children they serve;
3. develop and report on an early childhood accountability plan, in consultation with the cabinet;
4. implement a communications strategy for outreach to families, service providers, and policymakers;
5. start a statewide longitudinal evaluation of early childhood programs, in consultation with DSS; and
6. develop, coordinate, and support public and private partnerships to aid early childhood initiatives.

§ 1 — EARLY CHILDHOOD CABINET MEMBERSHIP

The cabinet is made up the heads or representatives of various departments, including SDE, DSS, and DPH, plus legislators and representatives of prekindergarten programs.

The act changes and expands the cabinet membership. It:

1. replaces the mental health and addiction services commissioner with the DCF commissioner,
2. changes the House minority leader's appointment from a Head Start program representative to a parent of a child attending a school readiness program,
3. adds the House majority leader's appointment of a Connecticut Family Resource Center Alliance representative,
4. adds the Senate majority leader's appointment of a state-funded child care center representative, and
5. increases the gubernatorial appointments from one to two by adding a representative of the Connecticut Head Start Association.

BACKGROUND

School Readiness

School readiness programs provide nonsectarian developmentally appropriate learning for three- and four-year-olds (and five-year-olds who are not eligible to enroll in school or choose school readiness instead according to statute). The programs must provide at least 450 hours over at least 180 days, with some exceptions, and must meet state standards (CGS § 10-16p).

Early Childhood Cabinet's Duties to Satisfy Federal Head Start

The cabinet carries out various coordination and planning duties and submits annual reports to the legislature with respect to children from birth to age nine (CGS § 10-16z(b)). These duties are required to satisfy the 2007 federal Head Start Act (P.L. 110-134).