

**State Advisory Council (SAC) Subcommittee
To the CT Early Childhood Cabinet**

January 8, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Attending: Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor, OEC; Harriet Feldlaufer, OEC; Debra Johnson, OEC, Lynn Johnson, OEC; Peter Palermino, DSS; Maria Synodi, SDE; Louis Tallarita, SDE; Elaine Zimmerman, Commission on Children, Joan Parris, Norwalk Community College; Helene Figueroa, CSEA-SEIU Local 2001; Bruni Edwards, Birth to Three – Education Connection; Imelda D-Luc, Child Care Learning Centers; Karen Rainville, CAEYC; Edie Reichard, Sleeping Giant Day Care; Eileen Ward, Children’s Community Development Center; Janet Storey, DMHAS

Introduction

OEC Commissioner Myra Jones-Taylor provided an introduction to Connecticut’s proposed federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) state plan. She stated the 2014 reauthorization of CCDF provides an historic shift in policy and how we approach child care in this country. In the late 1960s, the country was on a precipice of a commitment to child care with Congress approving legislation for universal access to child care. The measure was vetoed by President Nixon. In the late 1980s, the Child Care Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG) was passed by Congress. CCDBG was reauthorized in 1996 and linked with welfare reform, which resulted with the child care subsidy being viewed as a work support and not as much as meeting the needs of the child.

On November 14, 2014, CCDBG was reauthorized again with a shift in policy to reflect greater awareness of brain research, toxic stress and the developmental needs of the young child. Under this reauthorization, states must comply and make significant shifts in policy and how they administer their CCDF state plans in order to receive federal funding. CCDF focuses on three pillars: health, safety and school success. It focuses on continuity of care, which will result in reduced “churning” of children falling off and re-entering the child care subsidy program. Commissioner Jones-Taylor said the shift in CCDF is good for children, families and providers.

The federal Office of Child Care has released two pre-prints of its CCDF plan with opportunities for public comment. The final pre-print was released in November 2015. The new rules were released in late December 2015. OEC has taken steps to ensure stakeholders have opportunities for comment on Connecticut’s proposed plan. On September 30, 2015, the OEC brought Rachel Schumacher from the federal Office of Child Care to Connecticut to provide the State Advisory Council (SAC) with a CCDF overview. Today’s SAC meeting provides an opportunity to learn about highlights of Connecticut’s proposed CCDF plan and for SAC members and the public to ask questions and provide comments. The OEC is holding six public hearings the week of January 11 around the state. Stakeholders can also submit written comments using an online survey on the OEC website.

The OEC invites SAC members to participate in a small working group to review the public comments and consider modifications to the plan based on public feedback. The plan must be submitted to the federal government by March 1, 2016.

Overview of Connecticut Proposed CCDF State Plan

Harriet Feldlaufer, Division Director of Early Care and Education, and Debra Johnson, Division Director of Licensing, presented on Connecticut's proposed CCDF state plan. The following is an outline of the plan.

Section 1: Statewide Leadership and Coordination

- Utilize resources of the Departments of Education, Public Health and Emergency Services and Public Protection to create a statewide emergency disaster preparedness plan for child care providers serving children birth to age 12.

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

Section 2: Promoting Family Engagement through Outreach and Education

- Create a consumer-friendly website to include results of licensing inspections in plain language.

Implementation date: November 19, 2017

- Develop materials to help families make informed decisions when choosing of a child care provider.

Implementation: Ongoing

Section 3: Provide Stable Child Care Financial Assistance to Families

- 12-month eligibility period for Care 4 Kids recipients to allow families continuity of child care with no look back and limited reporting.

Implementation date: July 1, 2016

- Support families during a graduated phase out of the Care 4 Kids program for 12 months.

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

- Support a 3-month period of job search for families who lose employment.

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

Section 4: Ensure Equal Access to High Quality Child Care for Low-Income Children

- Work with national experts on an Alternative Methodology Study (AMS) using the "Provider Cost of Quality Calculator" to identify key elements and associated costs for the delivery of high quality care.
- Analyze payment rates in order to ensure equal access and family choice.
- Increase reimbursement for Care 4 Kids providers serving children with special needs from 15% to 25%.

Implementation date: March 1, 2016

- Provide tiered reimbursement for providers who achieve national accreditation.

Section 5: Establish Standards and Monitoring Processes to Ensure the Health and Safety of Child Care Settings

- Limit number of license-exempt providers eligible for Care 4 Kids subsidy to:

Implementation date: July 1, 2016

- Relatives, age 20 years or older, caring for children from birth to three years of age.
- Relatives, age 20 years or older, caring for children ages three to twelve only during non-standard hours.
- Programs administered by a public school system or municipal agency.
- Limit the capacity of care provided by license-exempt relatives to a total of three children with no more than two children under the age of two.

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

- Require license-exempt providers to comply with health and safety standards, submit to a criminal background check and complete professional development requirements.

Implementation date background check: September 30, 2017

Implementation date professional development: September 30, 2016

Section 6: Recruit and Retain a Qualified and Effective Child Care Workforce:

- Require all Care 4 Kids providers to complete 18 hours of orientation training within 3 months of caring for children through Care 4 Kids.

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

- Require all Care 4 Kids providers to complete annual professional development as follows:

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

- Licensed child care center/ group child care home providers and license-exempt providers - 1% of hours worked annually
- Licensed family child care providers -18 hours annually

Section 7: Support Continuous Improvement

- Develop a Quality Improvement System (QIS) to serve as an umbrella for all professional learning and technical assistance for child care providers including:

Implementation date: September 30, 2016

- Orientation and annual professional development requirements
- Technical assistance for programs to become licensed
- Technical assistance to achieve NAEYC and NAFCC accreditation

- All support activities delivered through the QIS will be evaluated by provider and program surveys of supports delivered.

Section 8: Ensure Grantee Program Integrity and Accountability

- The OEC will maintain overall responsibility for the administration of the CCDF program and will continue to monitor Connecticut's Child Care Resource and Referral Agency's (United Way of Connecticut) performance.
- The OEC will continue to set policies consistent with the CCDF plan.

Implementation: Ongoing

Questions and Comments from SAC Members

Commissioner Jones-Taylor invited SAC members to ask questions and offer feedback.

Eileen Ward, Children's Community Development Center, asked if the plan would address the problems with fingerprinting for background checks. She said that fingerprints often get smudged and must be resubmitted to state police, which results in lengthy delays.

Debra Johnson said the OEC recognizes this problem and is looking into moving to electronically scanned fingerprints.

Elaine Zimmerman, Commission on Children, said the proposed CCDF state plan is exciting. She suggested that the plan include home visiting, a two-generation framework, the voice of parents from the OEC parent focus groups and address cultural competency.

Harriet Feldlaufer said the plan commits to provide information about the child care subsidy program in multiple languages. Providers can be trained in cultural competency.

Karen Rainville, Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children, said the OEC has done a large amount of work on the proposed plan in a short amount of time. She said pages 131-132 suggest that legislation is in place regarding licensed family child care and license-exempt family, friends and neighbor, but that is not the case. She said the plan refers to a robust workforce Registry, but she noted the majority of Care4Kids providers are not in the Registry. She asked what is meant by a "regional technical network". She asked what is meant by "continuous quality improvement" and what is the timeframe for this process.

Ms. Feldlaufer said language could be modified to describe regional technical networks under the Quality Improvement System (QIS).

Peter Palermino, Department of Social Services, suggested that the OEC strategic plan should be incorporated into the CCDF(?) plan to reflect the larger early childhood landscape and framework that goes beyond the child care subsidy.

Louis Tallarita, State Department of Education, asked if the grace period for documentation for homeless children and requiring McKinney-Vento liaisons to sit on local School Readiness Councils needs legislative language. He suggested that providers need training in working with young children experiencing homelessness.

Commissioner Jones-Taylor stated that the Request for Proposals for the coming year's School Readiness programs includes a provision to have McKinney-Vento liaisons sit on local School Readiness Councils for participating communities. The OEC also plans to create a "protective services category" that will automatically deem homeless children eligible for Care4Kids regardless of the parent's work status. Legislation will also be proposed to create a 90-day grace period for homeless children regarding documentation of health and immunization records.

Helene Figueroa, CSEA-SEIU Local 2001, said no one wants the Connecticut application to fail. She said the OEC is faced with significant challenges in addressing the rule-making requirements that came out in late December. She said if all the federal requirements are implemented, it will cost significant dollars, and result in the Care4Kids closure due to funds being depleted before the end of a fiscal year. She noted implementing provisions in the family child care provider collective bargaining agreement has taken longer than hoped and this will likely happen with implementing the CCDF state plan. She noted

that the CCDF plan has very ambitious timelines. She said that fact that CCDBG is requiring significant policy shifts with very few new dollars is not the fault of the OEC and lobbying for additional funding is the work of the advocates. She said it is a challenge to support the proposed plan without knowing what is in the Quality Improvement System (QIS) contract with the United Way of Connecticut. She said the proposed CCDF plan does not mention the unmet needs study or the legislatively mandated workforce report. She concluded saying that the child care union wants to work with the OEC to modify the plan and support its implementation.

Commissioner Jones-Taylor said the federal government is requiring states to comply with the new requirements, regardless of funding challenges. The aggressive timelines are required by the federal government. Commissioner Jones-Taylor said the OEC cannot share the contents of the QIS contract until it is fully executed, at which time it can be made public.

Ms. Zimmerman said Connecticut has an opportunity to access additional funds for children by including children in the state's emergency disaster plan.

Mr. Palermino said there is another opportunity to access federal grant funds that is focusing on child care and workforce within two-generation framework. Ms. Zimmerman said that RFP is for \$25 million for 10 sites across the country.

Public Comment

Darlene Ragozzine, early childhood professional development consultant, asked if the OEC will track how many children may be displaced from child care as a result of eliminating family, friend and neighbor care during standard hours. Will there be other spaces for these children? She asked where the regional technical hubs will be located and will they be accessible for providers. She said the plan states that Connecticut has an informal QIS with its licensing and accreditation requirement, but she is not sure the field knows this.

David Wasch, Child Health and Education Facilities Authority, commended the OEC for providing so many opportunities for public comment on the proposed CCDF plan. He supports the focus on quality and professional development. He said the plan does not address early childhood facilities. He would be happy to support the OEC with training of providers about best practices regarding the child care physical environment.

Diana Gozempa, EASTCONN, supports the proposed increase for children with special needs but is not sure it is adequate. She said rate incentives are critical for infant-toddler care. She suggested that coaching would be a helpful component of the 18-week professional development requirement.

Ms. Figueroa said Family Resource Centers are missing in the proposed plan, noting many of them convene family child care providers and provide professional development.

Closing

Commissioner Jones-Taylor thanked SAC members and the public for their comments and questions. She said the OEC wants to be transparent and flexible throughout this process.

Ms. Feldlaufer said the public can submit comments on the federal CCDF rules until February 22. She said individuals interested in participating on the work group should send her an email.

Adjourn

The SAC meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.