

# Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting

April 18, 2023

## Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Deborah (Debbie) Mays (Chair), Elizabeth Waldrum, Tiffany Sharp, Tyra Greenwood, Mark Taylor, Stephanie Harmon, Rep. Denise Garner, Barbie Baxter

Members Absent: Senator David Wallace

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### I. Call to Order

Debbie Mays called the AECC Commissioner's Meeting to order April 18, 2023, at 10:19 a.m. Debbie Mays read the AECC's mission statement.

### II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made and seconded to approve the January 17, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion carried. The meeting minutes are approved.

### III. Old Business

- DCCECE Commission Report: Tonya Williams welcomed Rep. Denise Garner and Stephanie Harmon to the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission.
  - The ARPA Grant has helped our field greatly the last 3 years. Our state did not lose providers in large numbers. Two hundred providers were approved.
  - Many of the Level 6 participants are from family child care programs.
  - We're on the back side of the relief funding. Over a half a billion has been spent between the end of 2021 until now.
  - We still have our TEACH scholarships. These scholarships are for early childhood professionals who want to get degrees. We've gone from 30 up to 300 professionals who are going to college to get a degree or credentials.
- HSSCO/AHSA Updates: Barbie Baxter provided the following update:

Regarding critical issues Head Start programs are facing this last quarter please see the following data collected from directors across the state:

  - **Meeting Funded Enrollment** - Directors have reported that they are still struggling to meet their funded enrollment for the Office of Head Start. Programs are continually working on and seeking new methods for recruitment of income eligible children to serve. A few programs have reported positive results with incorporating electronic billboards, and recruitment flyer book inserts at their local libraries. Recruitment efforts are continuous and on-going for all programs.
  - **Conversions/Change in Scope Requests** - A few programs are awaiting official decisions from the Office of Head Start on conversion/change in scope requests. Converting funded enrollment slots from Head Start to Early Head Start based on the needs of the communities in which they serve.
  - **Recruitment and Retention of Quality Teaching Staff** - Across the state Head Start programs are struggling with the retention of their current qualified teaching staff and the recruitment of qualified new employees. Many programs have established partnership agreements with local colleges in order to recruit potential early childhood education graduates. Retention of current

staff is also a hot topic among programs; many programs have implemented staff wellness programs to support their current employees and made every effort to offer competitive salaries that are within their current budgets for employees.

- **Children's Behaviors** - Programs report they are still struggling in some cases with children in their classrooms who are displaying extreme behaviors. Some report that the children are extremely aggressive in some cases and disrupt the learning environment and in some cases pose a safety threat to their peers and even their teachers. The majority of the programs have implemented and are using behavior modification techniques and tools such as Conscience Discipline but the teachers are still struggling with immediate classroom assistance regarding on how to effectively deal with extreme behaviors in their classrooms. In most cases, programs are taking advantage of mental health services that are offered throughout the state to assist, however, in a few cases where parents are reluctant to acknowledge or accept the help that is offered; the teaching staff are still facing the challenges that come with having a child or children in their classrooms who display extreme behaviors, all while still trying to positively engage and interact with the other children in their classroom all while continually trying to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in their classrooms.
- **Arkansas Head Start Association Institute Update:**  
The Arkansas Head Start Association Institute "Honoring the Past, Treasuring the Present, and Shaping the Future" is scheduled for June 6-9, 2023 at the Arlington Resort Hotel & Spa. Early Bird Registration is prior to May 1, 2023. We are excited about this year's presenters. As part of the institute, we are having an Opioid and Substance Misuse Summit on June 6, 2023 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- ARPA Updates/Stabilization Grant: Paige Cox provided highlights from the Commission Report.
  - We have paid and approved over 236 million dollars.
  - We're also continuing to work with providers who submitted expansion grant applications back in the Fall.
  - We've served over 7,000 additional children (infants, toddlers and school agers) with ARPA funds.
  - We are winding down the Essential Worker funding. A small amount of funding is still left. Those funds will be used by giving preference to applications from areas affected by the recent tornado (Pulaski, Lonoke and Cross counties).
- TEACH Scholarship Program Update: Paul Lazenby was unable to attend. (See TEACH handout)

#### IV. New Business

- Act 237: Tonya Williams provided the following updates:
  - No longer the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. It's now the Office of Early Learning.
  - LEARNS moves the Division of Child Care, Part C, Part B, ABC and the Head Start Collaboration Office into the Office of Early Learning.
  - Placement Residential will remain at DHS.
  - Currently, we do not have a plan for a physical move.
  - The transition will go into full effect on or around July 1, 2023.
  - 166 applications have been received to participate in the Early Learning Workgroups.
  - Head start is federally to locally funded. We have no authority over head start. This law does not change that. We work in partnership with head start and they work in partnership

with us. We're doing everything we can to create systems that Head Start want to be a part of. We want to have all the information, so we can serve all children, including Head Start and many of their programs participate in Better Beginnings, Quality Rating and Improvement System, and many other services our division offers.

- New Family Childcare Network Advisor

- Jackie Couture is the new Family Childcare Network Advisor.

- Early Childhood Solutions

- Elizabeth Scudder and Debbie Mays provided an overview of the services Early Childhood Solutions offer.

- New AECC Chair Selection

- A motion was made and seconded to elect Elizabeth Waldrum as new chair. The motion carried. Elizabeth Waldrum is the new AECC Chair.

**V. Next Meeting**

- The next meeting will be held July 18, 2023. Location to be determined.

**VI. Adjournment**

- A motioned was made and seconded to adjourn. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 11:19 a.m.