

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting

April 19, 2022

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Deborah (Debbie) Mays (Chair), Dr. Cheri Smith, Tiffany Sharp, Tyra Greenwood, Ryan Clayborn, Mark Taylor, Elizabeth Waldrum

Members Absent: Senator David Wallace, Jan Stafford, Representative Megan Godfrey

I. Call to Order

Deborah Mays called the AECC Commissioners Meeting to order on April 19, 2022, at 10:02 a.m. Deborah Mays read the AECC's mission statement. Tonya Williams welcomed and introduced Tyra Greenwood. She serves in the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters. Her term expires June 30, 2024.

II. Approval of Minutes

Deborah Mays requested a motion for approval of the October 19, 2021 and January 18, 2022 meeting minutes. Mark Taylor motioned to approve, Tyra Greenwood seconded the motion, none opposed.

III. Old Business

- DCCECE Commission Report: Tonya Williams highlighted the following points:
 - Expansion opportunities are available for existing licensed programs that were licensed prior to March 11, 2021.
 - The Supply Building grant, from the American Rescue Plan Act, closed last Friday. About 59 applications were received from across the state.
 - Currently serving 16,000 families with Essential Worker Vouchers.
 - Received notifications about schools that are going to four day schedules. If schools are going to be closed a day/one day, we need that notification in order to key child care authorizations for school age children. If it's a virtual day, we don't pay for that, because the school is open. If the school is actually open for four days, we will be helping families. This will impact our Child Care Development Block Grant. School age children who were typically in school will be getting a full time voucher. We will continue to monitor this, as it seems to be fairly small in number. We will be getting a baseline for this year, as we're seeing quite a bit of increase.
- HSSCO/AHSA Updates: Jackie Govan provided updates on Head Start State Collaboration Office and Arkansas Head Start Association. The following updates were highlighted during the meeting:
 - The Arkansas Head Start Association meets every other month to look at certain issues that has to do with programing and dollar per child. One of the key issues that staff are having problems with is staffing and getting qualified staff.
 - Wellness training about the mind, body and spirit has been provided to families.
 - Conducting "Powerful Conversations" with fathers: The link for the last session has been uploaded to website. Seven fathers were interviewed from Jacksonville.
 - Opioid and Substance Misuse Summit will be held September 27-30, 2022.
 - Five states will meet and address how they plan on addressing opioid and substance misuse.

- Dolly Parton is coming to Arkansas May 5, 2022. The event will be held at the Governor's mansion. She's going to do a couple of songs.
- The Imagination Library in Arkansas has grown from 29 counties to all 75 counties.
- Family Child Care Network Updates: In her absence, Elizabeth Scudder provided a handout with her updates regarding Arkansas's Family Child Care Network. The following points were listed on the handout:
 - Family Child Care Network Support: Twenty-Five (25) % of Shaneil "PJ" Yarbrough's time is now dedicated to working with the Family Child Care Network in the Ouachita and Nevada Counties in Region 4
 - Family Child Care Network Support: A Be Well Care Well Coach has been added to the Family Child Care Network in Washington and Benton counties in Region 1. Twenty-Five (25) % of her time will be spent working with the Family Child Care Network, while 75% of her time will be spent working with 10 Family Child Care Providers through the BWCW model.
 - Providers in the Network: We have continued to receive additional Memorandums of Understanding from licensed and unlicensed providers across the State. We have engaged with and received MOUs from 152 providers since July 2020.
 - Brigance Developmental Screening Kits: We have begun a campaign to provide Brigance Screening tool kits to providers across the State. Training Sessions have begun, and kits are being utilized in three regions thus far. We have trained 14 providers in 6 counties on how to use the tool. As they complete the screenings in their programs, we will work with them to make any needed referrals to the Educational Cooperatives and First Connections contractors in their areas. Our goal is to get screening kits in every region and every home. We encourage providers to screen at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.
 - Licensing: The FCCN is currently working with 12 potential providers to license.
 - Advisory Council: We have added a provider from each region to the Advisory Council. That gives us five providers on the council to speak for the providers in their area.
 - Leveling up in Better Beginnings: We continue to assist providers on their journey to quality. We are very pleased with the number of homes that have chosen to commit to moving up in quality.
 - Contacts: During January, February, and March, the FCCN made 717 contacts with providers through calls, texts, emails, face-to-face, and ZOO
- ARPA Updates/Stabilization Grant:
 - There has been a total of 2,255 applications paid to providers, which comes to \$101M.
 - For the Operational Grant, the average amount that each provider receives is \$24,514.
 - For the Quality Improvement Grant, \$66,985. Some providers still have not applied for funding or are declining the opportunity.
 - The range of funding for the Operational Grant awards are between \$5,000-\$47,000.
 - The range of funding for the Quality Improvement Grant are between \$1,500-\$312,000.
 - With regard to the Expansion Grant, 120 applications have been received and 457 applications are currently in progress.
 - For Supply Building, if applicants missed the deadline, they can still submit an application. Late applications will be put to the side. If additional funds are available, late applications may be reviewed.

- TEACH Scholarship Program Update: Paul Lazenby provided updates regarding the TEACH Scholarship Program. The following points were highlighted:
 - Three new colleges have been brought on this semester (Arkansas State, Harding University, UA Rich Mountain). For summer and fall, U of A Fayetteville for the Birth to Kindergarten Program.
 - TEACH was designed to meet the needs of full time working students. Someone has to be working at least 20 hours a week in a licensed program to be eligible.
 - For students who may not be working full time and maybe went to school full time and the Birth to Kindergarten program, we are doing on a case-by-case basis scholarships outside of TEACH using the same ARPA funds. The scholarship will look similar to the lottery scholarship with the state of Arkansas. The same percentages will be paid that is done for TEACH which is 90% of tuition and 90% books. They'll get a travel stipend every semester. Requirements are: must complete 30 hours a year and have at least a 2.0 GPA.
 - Currently doing some outreach with some of the larger employers. Currently have done two presentations, one at Pediatrics Plus.
 - Currently increasing staffing to help recruit. Three new employees will be joining the team the second week of May. Laura House will be the Step Up to Wages Manager. Step Up to Wages will begin Summer/Fall. Elizabeth Miller is coming on as a second teacher/counselor. Karen Lowry will serve as the Data Specialist/Administrative Assistant.
 - At the July meeting, will have all of the final Spring 2022 reporting, data, demographics, grades, credit hours and possibly the annual report.
 - ACA is also having a face-to-face conference this year. It will be in North Little Rock, October 12-15, 2022 at the Wyndham Riverfront. Registration will open sometime in May.
- Salary Schedule Update: Tonya Williams provided an update on the Salary Schedule.
 - Laura Webb took the information we had previously discussed and put the schedule together.
 - The schedule is in no way reflective of the entire state. It's just state recommendations. It was taken out to 16 years. It can go up to 20 years or 25 years or wherever we need to stop.
 - The bachelor's salary was aligned with the teacher starting salary in AR. This is a starting point that would look like an average for the state. It will not be a mandate. It will just be a recommended salary schedule.
 - Once we're in agreement, it will be posted to our website so that programs can potentially use it.
 - Typo on doctorate level need to be corrected.
 - Welcome to Fleta Watson who is Laura Webb's new team member.

IV. New Business

- Commodity Distribution Unit: Jim Ponzini, the Program Administrator for the Commodity Distribution Unit, provided the following information:
 - His unit is a food distribution agency for the USDA for all of their programs in Arkansas.
 - The School Lunch Program and Child and Adult Care Feeding Programs are administered by both the Nutrition Unit and the Department of Education.

- The unit is a logistics operation that orders food from the USDA. That food is distributed to all the different programs.
- The unit provides food during the Summer, while kids are out of school. This year, \$14M can be used for Summer feeding.
- There's also a household side. The Emergency Food Assistance Program is the Household Program. You may remember it as the Government Cheese Program. In this program, food is ordered and distributed through food banks and community action agencies in every county of the state.
- Orders are typically placed six months to a year in advance. The price can change from the time USDA purchases the item and the unit delivers it.
- Bonus food: Is food the USDA uses as a price levelization when there's an abundance or surplus of food in the market. This happens when farmers are not selling, because it's not bringing a high enough price or prices dipping dramatically.
- There's also a feeding program for seniors and for disasters.
- Food safety is taken seriously and is monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If the food doesn't look right when the load arrives, it will be rejected.
- Currently working on three grants. They all are designed to work with local farmers. One grant is designed to build capacity that provides funding for underserved areas of the state, one is designed to purchase food from socially disadvantaged farmers and the last grant uses those same socially disadvantaged farmers to purchase food and provide it to schools in Arkansas.
- Tankersley Food Services is our state contracted warehouse. It's located in Van Buren, AR. At any given time, there's about 100,000 cases of food stored there.

V. Announcements/Action Items

- ACA Conference: October 12-15, 2022
- Family Child Care Providers Meeting in June (face-to-face)
- Opioid and Substance Misuse Summit: September 27-30, 2022
- Amber Riddle was recently recognized as the Outstanding Early Childhood Professional. She will be added to the agenda.
- Her site has one of the best playgrounds and it doesn't include any playground equipment. It is a very natural outdoor playground.
- Her site is located in Hensley, right off the main road.
- Amber will definitely be at our meetings in the coming year.
- ACTION ITEM – Check salary information for zero experience – Lori Bridges
- ACTION ITEM – Correct typo on doctorate level of salary schedule – Laura Webb
- ACTION ITEM – Add Amber Riddle to July agenda – Keeler Bryson
- ACTION ITEM – Get pic of Amber's playground – Tonya Williams
- ACTION ITEM – Add Kelli Hilburn to July agenda – Keeler Bryson
- ACTION ITEM – Send out draft of Better Beginning's Promulgation Packet – Tonya Williams

VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:09 a.m.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held July 19, 2022. Location to be determined.