

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting
April 20, 2021
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Deborah (Debbie) Mays (Chair), Mark Taylor, Jan Stafford, Kim Whitman, Dr. Cheri Smith

Members Absent: Staci Croom-Raley, Sarah Langley, Senator Will Bond, Representative LeAnne Burch, Ryan Clayborn, Tiffany Sharp

I. Call to Order

Deborah Mays called the AECC Commissioners' Meeting to order on April 20, at 10:07 a.m. Deborah Mays read the AECC's mission statement.

II. Approval of Minutes

Quorum was not met at the April 20, 2021 meeting. Motion to approve meeting minutes from October 20, 2020 and January 19, 2021 minutes will be held at the July 20, 2021 meeting.

III. Old Business

1. DCCECE COVID-19 Report: Tonya Williams provided updates regarding the DCCECE's COVID-19 CARES Act funding efforts. The following points were highlighted during the meeting:
 - DCCECE provided a full report to all Commissioners on COVID-19 pandemic relief spending and guidelines for early care and education providers.
 - Arkansas has approved 114 new programs to be licensed since March 2020 and 40 programs have permanently closed resulting in a net gain of 74 programs statewide.
 - To date, 1,132 children and 1,650 staff members have tested positive in early childhood educational settings (NOTE: this number is small compared to Arkansas's licensed capacity of approximately 160,000).
 - DCCECE has received an unprecedented amount of funding through the three federal COVID-19 pandemic relief bills.
 - CARES 41 million Exhausted funds in January 2021
 - CRSSA 119 million Awarded funds in February 2021
 - ARP 464 million Awarded funds in April 2021
 - All 41 million dollars of CARES Act funding was expended by January 2021 on supplemental payments, essential worker vouchers, maintenance payments, sanitation & PPE payments, and deep cleaning reimbursement.
 - Presently, 26 million dollars of CRSSA funding has been expended on supplemental payments, essential worker cases, maintenance payments, and deep cleaning reimbursement.
 - DCCECE has not had any permanent full-time staff added to assist with disseminating the COVID-19 funding.
 - As a result of COVID funding, DCCECE is seeing an increase in the number of

providers who accept subsidy.

- Currently, DCCECE is serving 7,638 families through the Essential Worker Funding. This is the first time in history DCCECE has served families without regard to income.

2. 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 federal Office of Head Start Office has appointed a new director, Dr. Bernadine Futrell. Dr. Futrell is a former Head Start Assistant Teacher.
- The Office of Head Start will set up a Head Start Steering Committee to include state and local input on key decision-making points.
- The majority of Arkansas Head Start programs are open (Note: programs may be virtual, in person, or a combination of the two).
- The Office of Head Start has implemented new duration requirement in March 2021
- Head Start received additional funding one-time funding under CRSSA and the ARP
- The Office of Head Start expects to administer approximately 1000 relief grants using COVID-19 funding
- The Office of Head Start offered dynamic support to early childhood professionals who elected to receive the COVID-19 vaccine by allocating funding for vaccine sick days and covering other expenses.
- The Office of Head Start has put together a tool kit with posters and pictures to motivate staff to get the vaccine. This project is titled “Build Back Better” and “#sleeveup” for Head Start.
- The Arkansas Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) worked with Global Ties and they have assigned a fellow to work with the Arkansas office starting in April 2021.
- HSSCO worked with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) to address homelessness. The first meeting of their new coalition is next week.
- In 2022, Arkansas is scheduled to host the “5 States Head Start Conference”
- Jackie Govan was asked to be a panelist at a national event to discuss the Arkansas model of addressing equity (6 Degrees to Racial Equity)
- Jackie Govan was asked to do a national presentation on Arkansas’s school Readiness 10 Schools Initiative.
- **Action Item:** Dawn Jeffrey will connect with Jackie Govan on AR Better Beginnings Levels 4-6.
- **Action Item:** Jackie Govan will share the information on the Early Head Start Partnership awards.

3. TEACH Updates: Paul Lazenby provided updates regarding Arkansas’s TEACH Scholarship Initiative. The following points were highlighted during the meeting:

- Arkansas had the first TEACH monitoring visit from the national office in March 2020

and it went well.

- Arkansas's TEACH Program was recommended to move to a regular license from a provisional license and move to monitoring every 2-3 years.
- Arkansas requested to operate on a full-time basis remotely. This request was presented to the advisory board and approved.
- The Certificate of Proficiency was approved as a program of study eligible for a TEACH scholarship by the advisory board.
- Arkansas will have first associate degree graduates from the TEACH program in Summer 2021.
- Currently, TEACH has a waitlist of 10 applications.
- TEACH is reviewing other potential funding streams.
- 16 Participants finished TEACH contracts in January 2021 and 20 additional Participants will complete their contracts in May 2021. All contracts will be renewed.

IV. New Business

1. Pre-K RISE: Lori Bridges provided updates regarding the ABC Pre-K RISE Initiative. The following points were highlighted during the meeting:

- The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) is the primary entity responsible for the rollout of the Pre-K RISE Initiative.
- RISE is a literacy curriculum for elementary aged children
- Pre-K RISE was created in alignment with RISE
- Phase 1 of 2 will begin in July 2021 (dissemination of materials)
- Phase 2 of 2 will begin in January 2022 (professional development and implementation)
- ADE presented a graphic and video detailing the program
- Lori Bridges placed her email address in the chat box for questions
- **Action Item:** Commissioners will notify Lori Bridges if they have a group interested in participating in Pre-K RISE.
- **Action Item:** Lori Bridges will facilitate a meeting between all interested individuals to discuss the Pre-K RISE Initiative.

V. Announcements/Action Items

- DCCECE Assistant Director Ashelyn Abney welcomed a beautiful granddaughter.
- DCCECE received notification of award for a projected 464 million dollars from the American Rescue Plan. 178 million must be used for Essential Worker child care. The funding must be expended by September 2024.
- Public Comments were provided by three Early Childhood Education providers in Arkansas. See details below:
 - Robin Slaton: Ms. Slayton was thankful for the COVID relief funding as it allowed her to keep her program open. However, she stated the child care community at large was experiencing a crisis of not being able to find proper staff. Due to the lack of available employees, Ms. Slayton can only open 6 of her 10 classrooms. Ms. Slayton suggested the DCCECE review the rate structure and delay the

expansion of Better Beginnings. Additionally, Ms. Slayton requested AECC/DCCECE include early childhood professionals in the decision-making processes.

- Dina Ford: Ms. Ford echoed the challenges mentioned by Ms. Slayton. Ms. Ford stated the increase in the minimum wage has provided a hardship for her center. Additionally, Ms. Ford stated she lost over 250,000 in revenue during the COVID pandemic. Ms. Ford raised an issue regarding the electronic regulatory check system.
- Sonia Keith: Ms. Keith stated in her opinion there was a big disconnect between owners/directors of early childhood facilities and DCCECE during the pandemic. Ms. Keith suggested the use of surveys to communicate with early childhood providers.
- Action Item: Dawn Jeffrey will connect with Jackie Govan on AR Better Beginnings Levels 4-6.
- Action Item: Jackie Govan will share the information on the Early Head Start Partnership awards.
- Action Item: Commissioners will notify Lori Bridges if they have a group interested in participating in Pre-K RISE.
- Action Item: Lori Bridges will facilitate a meeting between all interested individuals to discuss the Pre-K RISE Initiative.
- Action Item: Paige Cox will reach out and discuss the regulatory check system issues with Ms. Ford.
- Action Item: AECC will motion to create an ad-hoc provider sub-committee in July 2021.
- Action Item: Sara Norwood will send updated Pre-K RISE flyer.

VI. Adjournment

Deborah Mays adjourned the meeting at 11:50 a.m.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held July 20, 2021. Location to be determined.