

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission Meeting
October 20, 2020 am
Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Deborah Mays (Chair), Ryan Clayborn, Staci Croom-Raley, Tiffany Sharp, Kim Whitman, Dr. Cheri Smith, Sarah Langley, Jan Stafford

Members Absent: Mark Taylor, Senator Will Bond, Representative LeAnne Burch

I. Call to Order

Deborah Mays called the AECC Commissioners' Meeting to order on October 20, at 10:00 a.m. Deborah read the AECC's mission statement.

II. Approval of Minutes

Deborah Mays asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the July 21, 2020 meeting. A motion was made by Kim Whitman and the motion was seconded by Jan Stafford. The motion carried. None opposed.

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:

- CCDF has expended \$26 million of the \$41.4 million dollars that was award as part of the CARES Act.
- \$9.2 million has been expended to assist childcare facilities that either remained open or reopened since March 2020. These funds are used to purchase cleaning/sanitation items, equipment, and other items necessary to maintain safety during the pandemic.
- \$10.8 million has been expended by increasing the daily voucher rate per child during the declared state of emergency (Additional \$10/day for infants/toddlers, \$7/day for preschool, and \$5/day for school-aged). Funding runs parallel with the Governor's Emergency Order which was recently extended through December 12, 2020.
 - NOTE: This program ended for Essential Worker Vouchers effective September 2020.
- \$5.5 million has been expended for Essential Worker Child Care Assistance. Approximately 6,200 families have been approved to receive assistance through 12/31/2020. As of 10/9/2020, DCCECE will no longer be accepting applications for this program. If additional funding is received it will be allocated to currently authorized families or the approximately 1,000 families who are on the pending list.
- \$44,000 has been expended for Deep Cleaning Reimbursement for facilities who have a confirmed positive COVID-19 case in either a staff member or child. There is \$3 million in funding allocated to this effort so DCCECE can continue to support programs that have closed to deep clean.

- As of the meeting on 10/21/2020 there have been a total of 341 children and 546 staff members who have tested positive in early childhood educational settings since March 2020. This number is rising quickly, but most facilities can remain open and only close the affected area or room.
- DCCECE conditionally added over 500 providers to Level 1 Better Beginnings to serve children of Essential Workers.
- Between 50-100 providers are temporarily closed or virtual on any given day due to COVID-19. Some programs have been granted permission to utilize virtual learning. DCCECE is monitoring for permanent closures.
- There have been 20 permanent closures (13 centers, 7 childcare family homes) since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- DCCECE has received no indication that there is no service available in any region, however there are some areas in which infant/toddler care is limited. Including at least 2 counties where no infant/toddler care is available.
- Tonya Williams presented at the Capitol on 10/19/2020 to the Children and Youth Sub-Committee on Early Childhood Education. Tonya presented the highlighted information listed above.

2. HSSCO/AHSA Updates: Jackie Govan provided updates on HSSCO and AHSA. The following points were highlighted during the meeting:

- The Needs Assessment has been completed and will be used for the new 5-year grant renewal. A different approach was used this round and the assessment included data regarding racial equity across the state.
- Over the past year HSSCO and AHSA did a Family Engagement Self-Assessment. This document will also be used for the 5-year grant renewal.
- The grant renewal period will be 2021-2026. Documents related to the renewal will go to the board in November, then submitted to the Regional Office in December 2020.
- School Readiness Summit moved to March 5, 2021. The Office of Head Start extended the deadline to provide the summit until June 2021. The Summit will be conducted virtually if an in-person option is not feasible. The topic this year will be "Transition to Kindergarten". Arkansas has been asked to lead this endeavor and submit surveys that will be collected in 2021.
- The Arkansas Head Start Association Institute will be held April 6-9, 2021, at the Little Rock Doubletree Hotel. The Hotel currently has additional regulations regarding social distancing. If an in-person conference is not feasible, then a back-up plan will be proposed.
- Head Start will be recognizing outstanding staff at the November meeting (this is typically done during the Institute, but it was cancelled during 2020). Additionally, the "Reading is Electric" 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners will be announced.
- Head Start applied for an Opiate/Substance Abuse grant with the Arkansas Academy of Pediatrics and was awarded \$6,000. The first effort will be a networking meeting on 10/20/2020. Head Start will be pulling in programs from

across the early childhood education sectors.

- Head Start is still seeking funding for their Racial Equity project. Step 1 has already begun, and the brochures are ready to be disseminated across the state. In 2021, Zoom meetings or webinars will begin on this topic statewide.
- Head Start partnered with PBS on a research opportunity to look at families in Central Arkansas. “Splash and Bubbles” is a 1-hour interactive session for children ages 4 to 7 years old. The 1-hour session will be completed via Zoom. All families who participate will receive a Kindle and a \$25 gift card.
- New TA contractor (ICF) was announced for EHS/HS.

3. Family Child Care Network Updates: Elizabeth Scudder provided updates on the Family Child Care Network. The following points were highlighted during the meeting:

- During the AECC meeting in July the Family Child Care Network Database was mentioned. Since July, the Family Child Care Network has sent out surveys to 279 email addresses and have received over 50 responses.
- On target to meet goals and objectives for 2020.
- The largest response from the surveys was “Help us make more money”. The Family Child Care Network have begun problem solving to address this issue. One prominent suggestion was to have providers join Better Beginnings.
- The Family Child Care Network has established several collaborative partnerships this year including: Child Care Aware agencies, ASU/Better Beginnings Team, Lakeshore, Kaplan, Discount School Supplies, and CACFP Providers.
- The Family Child Care Network wrote for and were awarded a grant to disseminate cleaning supplies across the state. Because of the established collaborative partnerships this objective was completed.
- 32 MOUs have been signed (3 of which are unlicensed or unregulated homes serving between 3 and 5 children each)
- The HIPPIY Pilot Program is still in the works. Family Child Care Network will continue to work with the HIPPIY team to ensure this initiative can roll out.
- A noted gap was found. No Family Child Care Homes are open in Jackson County. A steering committee has been formed in Independence/Jackson counties to discuss the lack of infant/toddler care and family child care homes.
- The Family Child Care Network is hosting phone calls after the DCCECE Tuesday phone calls. The last call had 8 new providers from South Arkansas join.
- Additional projects: Prtizker, Elevate 8

IV. New Business

1. DCCECE Contract Update: Paige Cox provided updates on the DCCECE’s Contracts. The following points were highlighted:

- In March 2020, when the pandemic started the contracted providers reached out to DCCECE for guidance as they still wanted to serve and support Arkansas providers and families.
- In person training was no longer feasible, contractors shifted to virtual and online trainings.
- Many contractors had to convert previously in person trainings to online.

- The number of people accessing trainings drastically increased (see chart provided by Paige Cox).
 - Technical assistance visits did not decrease, contractors found innovative ways to reach providers. Contractors used video chat, zoom, phone calls, emails, and other unique methods of communication.
 - DCCECE set up a weekly call which has now transitioned to a monthly call to support contractors.
 - Currently, 95% of contractors are still not conducting face to face trainings and those who are conducting face to face events are doing so in accordance with CDC guidelines for safety.
 - **Action Item:** Paige Cox and Jackie Govan will work together to incorporate the 5 steps to racial equity into professional development.
2. Better Beginnings Levels 4-6 Update: Dawn Jeffery provided updates on the new higher levels of Better Beginnings (4, 5, 6). The following points were highlighted during the meeting:
- The original Better Beginnings Levels 4, 5, and 6 pilot programs have agreed to continue.
 - The rollout will occur in January 2021. DCCECE considered feedback from the pilot programs and other early childhood education stakeholders to simplify and condense the qualifications for levels 4, 5, and 6 to make it more user friendly.
 - Teacher credentialing and quality will be strongly considered as a part of levels 4, 5, and 6. DCCECE agreed to evaluate the process used to determine a “quality” educator following a discussion by the committee on credentialing and experience.
 - An early childhood screening component will be added to levels 4, 5, and 6.
 - **Action Item:** Tonya Williams will send Jackie Govan information on levels 4, 5, and 6 to include in her 5-year renewal grant.
 - Lower ratios will be a requirement for levels 4, 5, and 6. This will be in alignment with ABC and HS/EHS. The proposed lower ratios for level 6 will be smaller than that of ABC and HS/EHS.
 - Pilot programs were selected from both child care family homes and centers. Guidelines are written to be applicable to both.

V. Announcements/Action Items

Action Item: Paige Cox and Jackie Govan will work together to incorporate the 5 steps to racial equity into professional development.

Action Item: Tonya Williams will send Jackie Govan information on levels 4, 5, and 6 to include in her 5-year renewal grant.

VI. Adjournment

Deborah Mays asked for a motion to adjourn. Kim Whitman made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Dr. Cheri Smith. The motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at 11:10a.m.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held January 19, 2021. The location is to be determined.