

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting

January 16, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Elizabeth Waldrum (Chair), Deborah (Debbie) Mays, Tyra Greenwood, Barbie Baxter, Leah Henderson, Rep. Denise Garner, Senator Greg Leding

Members Absent: Senator Jane English, Tiffany Sharp

I. Call to Order

Elizabeth Waldrum called the AECC Commissioner's Meeting to order January 16, 2024, at 10:03 a.m. Elizabeth Waldrum read the AECC's mission statement. Tonya Williams welcomed Senator Greg Leding to the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission.

- II. **Approval of Minutes** - A motion was made by Senator Leding to approve the October 17, 2023 meeting minutes. Leah Henderson seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting minutes were approved.

III. Old Business

- DCCECE Commission/LEARNS Update: Tonya Williams provided the following update:
 - All grants have transitioned to the Arkansas Department of Education, in the Office of Early Childhood.
 - As of November 1, 2023, Child Nutrition and Commodities is now under Dr. Eric Saunders. The Office of Early Childhood and Child Nutrition and Commodities are still located in the DHS building.
 - Twelve Local Leads have been awarded. First cohort has begun. The next cohort will be awarded in the Spring.
 - Rules associated with the former Division of Child Care have been sent over to the legal team at ADE.
 - Part B & C are under Matt Sewell and Danita Pitts.
- AHSA Updates: Barbie Baxter presented the following HSSCO/AHSA updates:
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **Children's Behaviors** - Programs report they are still struggling in some cases with children in their classrooms who are displaying extreme misbehaviors. 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 misbehaviors 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 misbehaviors, 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.

- **Upcoming Events:**

- The Arkansas Head Start Association Training Institute is scheduled for April 30 through May 3, 2024. More information to come soon.

- HSSCO Updates: Jackie Govan presented the following updates:

- New Collaborative partners with the HSSCO: ACAAA and CSBG has completed a triad Inter-agency Agreement between the HSSCO, ACAAA, and CSBG.
- The funds from the PDG is being implemented to focus on Trauma Informed Care, increasing infants and toddlers' slots, and helping staff receive a family credential.
- AHSA/HSSCO State Institute for 2024
 - State Partnership Reception – April 29, 2024
 - Pre-Institute – Opioid & Substance Misuse – April 30, 2024
 - AHSA Institute Sessions – May 1-3, 2024

School Readiness Summit:

- Date: November 1, 2024
- The focus this year will be on the LEARNS Act/Arkansas Leads
- Location: Children's Hall

New Partnerships:

- New Director at Arkansas Advocacy – Keesa Smith
- ACAAA State Interagency Partnership Agreement
- MV State Liaisons/Head Start Homeless Liaisons
- Early Childhood Special Education/Head Start Disability Coordinators
- State 619 Coordinator

HSSCO Upcoming Events for 2024:

- Powerful Conversations with Fathers – March, July, and November
- School Readiness Summit/Arkansas Leads – November 1st
- The Roll Out of the Racial Equity Informational Webinars – TBA once approved.
- AHSA/HSSCO State Institute – April 29-May 3rd
- The 2024 Institute is scheduled for April 29 – May 3, 2024.

- ARPA Updates/Stabilization Grant: Paige Cox provided the following updates:

- AR committed \$40M to support TEACH; funds must be spent by September 30, 2024.
- We did receive approval for the \$27.7M for current fiscal year and next fiscal year; \$13M will be spent through next fiscal year.

- TEACH Scholarship Program Update: Paul Lazenby provided the following updates:

- Spring 2024, 395 students have enrolled

- In 2023, served 376 students, includes all degree programs
- 16,765 Children Benefitted
- Continuing to see growth in counties (South & East Arkansas) where the majority are person of color
- 77% Subsidy Funds
- There is some increase in hourly wage
- College Credit Earned: 4,868; Average is 15 per year
- Had 61 TEACH graduates in 2023
- 93.44 % of funds go towards scholarship activity

IV. New Business

- Behavior Help Annual Report: Nikki Edge & Melissa Sutton presented the following information:
 - Arkansas has the highest proportion of young children in the nation with a diagnosed mental, behavioral or developmental disorder.
 - 89% of AR ECE teachers reporting serving children with challenging behavior; 28% recently suspended or expelled
 - More than 1/3 of AR ECE teachers reported they feel ill prepared to work with children with behavioral problems
 - The Behavior Help System launched in 2016: No child shall be expelled without permission from the Office of Early Childhood, if program receives childcare vouchers
 - Requests for Behavior Help: www.BehaviorHelponline.org
- Prof Development Contracts (ABC/CCDF): Paige Cox & Lori Bridges presented the following information:
 - A list of Professional Service Grants has been developed for CCDF and state funded Pre-K Program. The list is still being refined.
 - OEC licenses almost 2,000 facilities across the state.
 - ACTION ITEM: Will get this list of contracts to Commissioners at next meeting.
 - Arkansas is one of few states that offer Professional Development training and technical assistance to early child care providers for free.
- AECC Commissioner On-boarding Discussion:
 - There hasn't been an AECC on-boarding session in a while. We've had some new commissioners. It would be training with the legal team.
 - May need a reset to look at the six goals of AECC. i.e. nutrition is no longer under OEC
 - ACTION ITEM: The six goals will be sent to Commissioners.
 - April's meeting will be extended to discuss further.

V. Summary/Announcements/Public Comments

- AHSA/HSSCO State Institute – April 29-May 3rd
- Jackie Govan - Virtual Book Study on, "Burn Out" & "Wellness"
- ACTION ITEM: At the April meeting, Debbie Mays would like to physically present National Accreditation of Family Child Care Homes.

VI. Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be held in-person/virtually April 16, 2024.

VII. **Adjournment**

Rep. Denise Garner made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Barbie Baxter. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:18p.m.