

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting

April 16, 2024

Meeting Minutes

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

Members Absent: Senator Jane English, Tiffany Sharp, Senator Greg Leding

I. Call to Order

Elizabeth Waldrum called the AECC Commissioner's Meeting to order April 16, 2024, at 10:05 a.m. Elizabeth Waldrum read the AECC's mission statement. Tonya Williams announced that Lori Bridges is the new Content and Professional Assistant Director and Jennifer Douglas is the new Local Leads Assistant Director.

- II. **Approval of Minutes** - A motion was made by Debbie Mays to approve the January 16, 2024 meeting minutes. Rep. Garner seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting minutes were approved.

III. Old Business

- DCCECE Commission/LEARNS Update: Tonya Williams provided the following update:
 - Since the transition, there's been a delay in payments to providers. We're working hard with finance team to resolve this issue.
 - Due to technology challenges with phones. The best way to communicate with the division is via email.
 - Better Beginnings: Levels 3-6: 789 programs. There are more levels 3-6 than there have been in levels 0-2. That has never been the case in Arkansas. There are more kids being served in quality level programs.
 - There is a projected \$10.1 million increase in CCDF funds in Arkansas
 - CLASS: In the LEARNS Act, there's a requirement to pilot a new tool that is associated with better child outcomes. CLASS is a tool that is used by federally funded head start programs. The people who need the training the most are teachers. They are the closest to children and are the ones who would need to understand how the tool works.
- 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.
- **CCDF State Plan:** Brandy Ishmon provided the following updates:
 - CCDF Plan due by the end of June 2024
 - The new plan will address market rates. The market rate survey is posted on website. Urban and rural rates have become one rate.
- **TEACH Scholarship Program Update:** Paul Lazenby provided the following updates:
 - Pathway Goal has been met
 - Fall stats: Total credits earned: 2,543; Credits per Scholar: 6.8; Average GPA: 3.53; Total 2023 graduates: 61
 - Spring 2024, 391 individuals served
 - Step Up to Wage\$ - Awards 6-month salary supplements based on education level and continuous employment with the same program.
 - 1st Quarter 2024 Stipends: \$1,204,932.75
 - Average 6-month stipend: \$1,332
 - New Component: Competency-based mentoring and skill building

IV. New Business

- **Early Childhood Subcommittee:** Leigh Keener presented the following information:
 - LEARNS & State Board of Education priorities: Access, Quality, Workforce and Systems
 - Long-term goal: Create 5-Year Strategic Plan
 - Estimated \$135M Funding Stream
 - Refined and restructured FY 2025-2027 CCDF Plan
 - Presumptive Eligibility: Float a family for up to 6 weeks; extended eligibility period
 - Prospective Pay: Will pay before date-of-service
 - Enrollment vs Attendance:
 - National Accreditation: AR does not support programs in their pursuit of national accreditation
 - Capturing ALICE Population: People that don't qualify
- **National Accreditation of Family Child Care Homes:** Debbie Mays presented the following information:
 - There are 20 Nationally Accredited Family Child Care Homes and 1 in process
 - NAFCC Accreditation Journey – Accredited for 3 years
 - Happy Provider Appreciation:

- Vernetta Burks
- Mandy Keymer-Harrison
- Mary Line - Bentonville
- Lorene Cahall – Evening Shade
- Beth Knight – Siloam Springs
- Kayla and Sylvester Adaway - Jonesboro
- Melissa Jenkins – Ash Flat
- Shalynn Lane – Ash Flat
- April Middleton – Valley Springs
- Christine Eichler – Romance
- Susan Meek – Fayetteville
- Michelle Mendoza – Garfield
- Carolyn Carney – Farmington
- Susan Wilkins-Danville
- Krista Houston
- Malissa Kaye – Little Rock AFB
- Debbie Mays

● Introduction of Assigned Attorney General Staff:

- Sarah DeBusk is the assigned attorney to the AECC from the Attorney General's Office

V. Summary/Announcements/Public Comments

- April 30, 2024 CCDF Public Hearing - ADE Auditorium
- June 11, 2024 AR Assoc for Infant Mental Health – Four Points By Sheraton, Little Rock
- June 20-21, 2024 Physical Activity Summit – Greenbrier, AR
- July 8-10, 2024 ADE Summit – Hot Springs, AR
- Comment from A Provider: *“Appreciation and thanks to the OEC team for their hard work through the pandemic and the transition to ADE. As Providers, this transition has been hard for us too. Your systems have really helped. You’ve made it look so effortless.”*
- Comment from Rep Garner: *“We don’t know what policies need to be changed, unless you tell us. Any of us (legislators) will help. We depend on the folks that are on the ground to tell us what’s happening and what needs to be changed. So, please let us know what’s going on.”*

VI. Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be held in the ADE Board Room #201A, July 16, 2024.

VII. Adjournment

Rep. Denise Garner made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Debbie Mays. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:00p.m.