

# Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) Meeting

October 17, 2023

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Elizabeth Waldrum (Chair), Deborah (Debbie) Mays, Tyra Greenwood, Senator Jane English, Barbie Baxter

Members Absent: Senator David Wallace, Tiffany Sharp, Rep. Denise Garner, Leah Henderson

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## I. Call to Order

Elizabeth Waldrum called the AECC Commissioner's Meeting to order October 17, 2023, at 10:09 a.m. Elizabeth Waldrum read the AECC's mission statement.

**Approval of Minutes** - A motion was made (via email since a quorum was not available during the 10-17-23 meeting) by Debbie Mays to approve the July 18, 2023 meeting minutes. Senator Jane English seconded it. The motion carried. The meeting minutes were approved.

## II. Old Business

- DCCECE Commission/LEARNS Update: Tonya Williams provided an update on the August 1, 2023 transition to the AR Dept of Education, Early LEARNS Workgroup, Local Leads and Kindergarten Readiness Definition. All Stabilization Grant funds have been distributed. The Supplemental Grant ends September 2024. This grants funds TEACH & Wage Program for our workforce.
- HSSCO/AHSA Updates: Barbie Baxter presented the following HSSCO/AHSA updates:
- **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. At the September 13, 2023 AHSA Director's Meeting, one director stated that these extreme misbehaviors have contributed to staff burnout and resignations. Many of the directors agreed with that statement.
- **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. Many programs have established partnership agreements with local colleges in order to recruit potential early childhood education graduates. Retention of current staff is also an on-going struggle among programs; many programs have implemented staff wellness programs to support their current employees and made every effort to offer competitive salaries that are within their current budgets for 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.
- ARPA Updates/Stabilization Grant: Tom Sheppard provided the following updates:
  - AR used considerably less admin money with ARPA grant
    - In Stabilization grant, only used 1% for admin
    - Supplemental grant, only used 2.8% for admin
    - Last week of September, issued checks for remaining \$258M of ARPA funds
- TEACH Scholarship Program Update: Paul Lazenby provided the following updates:
  - Presented what TEACH Scholarship includes
  - Spring 2024, 425 students have enrolled
  - In 2022/2023, served 376 students, includes all degree programs
  - Graduated 2 Head Start Scholars this year
  - College Credit Earned: 4,868
  - Had 32 graduates
  - As of third quarter, paid 640 stipends
  - Piloting TEACH Early Childhood Apprenticeship
  - Running program at about 4% admin rate

#### IV. New Business

- LEARNS: Tonya Williams covered this segment during Old Business segment.
- Child Care Appeal Review Applications:
  - Senator Jane English made a motion (via email since a quorum was not available during the 10-17-23 meeting) to approve the two Child Care Appeal Review Applications. Debbie Mays seconded it. The motion carried. The applications were approved.

#### V. Summary/Announcements/Public Comments

- The Arkansas Head Start Association Training Institute for is scheduled for April 30 through May 3, 2024. More information to come soon.
- The date for the School Readiness Summit is Friday, November 3, 2023 from 8:30 am until 4 pm at Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock. This event will focus on STEAM in Early Childhood Education. The event will feature exhibitors, facilitators, dynamic presentations, STEAM kits, door prizes, Early Childhood updates, STEAM Resource book, and so much more. For more information, please contact:
 

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**VI. Next Meeting**

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

**VII. Adjournment**

- Senator Jane English made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Tyra Greenwood. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 11:37 a.m.