

Meeting Notes for the North Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council

Friday, May 11, 2018

1:00 – 4:00 pm

NC Department of Transportation Board Room, Raleigh, NC

The following members were present:

Susan Butler-Staub, Lisa Chapman, Mandy Cohen, Jerry Croan, Terry David, Stephanie Fanjul, Laura Gerald, Eric Hart, Velva Jenkins, Dore LaForett, Kelly Maxwell, Karen McKnight, Susan Perry-Manning, Bernadette Rodgers, Meka Sales, Pam Shue, Janet Singerman, Ray Spain, Betsey Tilson, Banu Valladares, Kristin Walker, Donna White (for Cindy Watkins), Michelle Winstead

Secretary Mandy Cohen, Chair, convened the meeting, read the Conflict of Interest reminder, and introduced Governor Roy Cooper.

Governor Cooper welcomed the Council members, his staff, and guests. He emphasized the importance of the upcoming work of the Council and thanked the members for serving. He discussed the critical importance of early childhood education and health and the need to do more to meet specific needs of North Carolina's young children, such as addressing adverse childhood experiences. He highlighted his 2018-19 budget recommendations released the day prior that include an expansion of NC Pre-K, Smart Start, and child care for working families.

Secretary Cohen asked each member for personal introductions. Secretary Cohen introduced Representative Graig Meyer, who conducted the swearing-in of members.

Mr. Greg McLeod, Deputy General Counsel, Office of the Governor, provided a briefing on state ethics requirements for Council members. He shared that members should review the "Avoiding Conflicts of Interest" document in their meeting packet and contact him with any questions.

Ms. Kristen Guillory, Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor, provided an overview of the purpose and goals for the Council. She explained that the Council will meet federal requirements intended to promote broad, statewide coordination and collaboration among the wide range of early childhood programs in the state. The Council will also provide reviews of

specific components of the state plans for the Child Care Development Block Grant and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting program, as required. In addition to federal requirements, she emphasized, the Council is given the opportunity to identify and recommend bold actions and to provide leadership to ensure progress for young children's health, education, and well-being in the state. She also overviewed other commissions and councils that may be addressing early childhood issues, including the Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education and the B-3 (Birth – 3rd Grade) Interagency Council. She stated that members will be kept up-to-date on the work of other groups to coordinate as needed.

Secretary Cohen facilitated a discussion among members about priorities for the work of the Council. Comments and themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- Unique opportunity to work on big picture, long-term issues rather than individual pieces in the short-term. Think about the big, bold vision over many years and creating something that we can build from.
- Consider a collective vision for our state for children and families and a framework for an aligned set of services with consistency. How do we bring the individual pieces together? What are the best strategies for putting the pieces together and where do we find those strategies? Important to think about the continuum of early childhood services for all ages. In our communities, every family needs a continuum of available services and resources, yet many communities are lacking services. Our mindset should be universal – what do all children need?
- Focus on the needs of the families, using a broad definition of family. You cannot separate the child from the needs of the family. Need better sharing of information about families.
- Focus on equity and challenge our assumptions about best practices from this perspective.
- Balance vision with action.

Secretary Cohen then presented the NC Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) "Vision for Improving Early Childhood Health, Safety and Education." She presented a visual of the disconnect between health care spending and the factors that actually drive health outcomes and said that improving health depends on addressing social needs, not just providing

direct medical care. She overviewed the current DHHS priorities of Medicaid transformation, addressing the opioid crisis, and improving early childhood health and education. She further explained that Medicaid transformation includes a transition to a managed care system and a sharper focus on addressing social determinants of health and that addressing the opioid crisis includes reducing deaths and mitigating impacts on families. She explained that the DHHS priority on early childhood is critically important because the foundation for future learning, health and well-being is built during early childhood and early experiences shape brain architecture. She overviewed current indicators for children's well-being in North Carolina, such as food insecurity, and the programs that DHHS provides in the areas of health, safety, and development and education. She announced that DHHS is working on an Early Childhood Action Plan, covering health, safety and early learning. (full presentation is available)

Susan Perry-Manning presented on the development of the Early Childhood Action Plan in more detail and asked the Council to contribute to this work in an ongoing way. She presented the overall vision that "All North Carolina children get a healthy start and develop to their full potential in safe and nurturing families, schools, and communities" and presented the guiding principles for the plan. She explained that the planning process has used the work of the NC Pathways to Grade-Level Reading initiative to help inform and prioritize outcome measures for children that will guide the action plan and she reviewed the outcome measures currently included, such as increasing the percentage of infants with healthy birthweight; increasing the percentage of young children with food security; decreasing child abuse and neglect; and increasing the percentage of children who enter kindergarten developmentally on track. She explained the next steps in the process of developing the plan, which include establishing targets for the outcome measures, identifying the high-level intervention strategies that will move those targets, and engaging stakeholders in developing and supporting the plan. (full presentation is available)

Secretary Cohen facilitated questions, discussion and recommendations about the Early Childhood Action Plan and the outcomes, as well as additional discussion about priorities for the Council. Comments and themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- Use disaggregated data (such as geographic area and demographics) to develop and prioritize strategies.

- Increase our focus on and understanding of community factors. What does a supportive community look like and how do families access those supports? How can we use data to better understand these community protective factors and identify the areas of need? A guiding principle on community indicators could be explored directly with communities by asking “What do you think about your community and what it needs?” We should also think about how to best assess resilience and family well-being.
- Defining measures should take into consideration what can make the most impact. Also, for outcome measures, some should be aspirational and some should be achievable.
- Using an indicator about children’s readiness when they start school must also include the readiness of the schools to meet children’s needs.
- Address the wait list for Pre-K – we need more children in early education, requiring more funding and more space.
- The guiding principles should include one on equity.
- We should test and use communication strategies to foster greater support for investing in meeting outcomes for children/supporting optimal brain development. Effective communication is critical – use the right language and use a common message.
- Using the new DHHS interactive map showing social determinants of health indicators for counties across NC is a good place to start for further analysis and discussion. Infant mortality, for example, is a good indicator to focus on because you need to change community factors to address it.

Secretary Cohen asked members what information would be useful to support the work of the Council. Responses included:

- Key statewide data points to help with identifying priorities.
- Keeping up-to-date on the work of other groups addressing early childhood.
- Identifying strengths/areas where NC has been successful before and how to build on those.
- Identifying areas where NC is “stuck” – or not able to move forward – and how to move forward.
- Identifying a set of the highest yield intervention strategies. Look at examples of strategies working in other places.

Secretary Cohen stated that subsequent meeting dates will be announced later and that the Council's work will include communication and tasks in between the regular meetings.

Secretary Cohen adjourned the meeting at 4pm.