MINNESOTA

Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force
Tuesday, March 29, 2022
6:00p.m. to 8:00p.m.
Virtual Meeting: WebEx
Also available by livestream to the public.

Task Force Members Present: Ann McCully, Amy Walstien, Barb Fabre, Brook LaFloe, Cindi Yang, Cyndi Cunningham, Deb Fitzpatrick, Debbie Hewitt, Janell Bentz, Jenny Moses, Karen Fogg, Senator Karin Housley, Kraig Gratke, Krystal Shatek, Rena Schlottach-Ratcliff, Lauryn Schothorst, Representative Liz Boldon, Representative Peggy Bennett, Tonia Villegas, Meghan Caine, Senator Melissa Wiklund, Michelle Trelsted, Missy Okeson, Nancy Hafner, Nicole Blissenbach, Oriane Casale, Sandy Simar, Shakira Bradshaw, Summer Bursch, Suzanne Pearl

Task Force Members Absent: Clare Sanford, Adriana Lopez, Jayne Whiteford, Kathleen Church, Luciana Carballo, Pat Ives, Lydia Boerboom

Task Force Consultants Present: Katie Reed, Afton Partners; Ellen Johnson, Afton Partners; Gerald Liu, Afton Partners; Brytain Tate, Afton Partners

Children's Cabinet Staff Present: Hannah Quinn

Welcome and Agenda
Task Force members reviewed virtual meeting protocols, voting protocols, and went over the agenda for the meeting. The agenda included revisiting the definition of historically disenfranchised groups, assessing the stakeholders in the system, moving our vision of effectiveness forward, and identifying access improvement options.

Guiding Principles
Members took an informal vote to approve the revised Guiding Principles that have been edited in earlier meetings. The Guiding Principles reflect the Task Force's values and beliefs, guide how it operates, and lay a foundation for decision-making. They were approved with 25 votes.
- Promote Equity: We will prioritize a system that promotes equitable outcomes, with a specific focus on children of color and building cultural competency in ECE classrooms.
- Prioritize Family Perspectives, Needs, and Choices: We will prioritize families' perspectives, needs, and choices as we make data driven and evidence informed recommendations, recognizing that all provider types and settings provide value to the system.
- Support the Power of Local Communities: We will ensure local communities are able to define their own priorities and are supported to build the system that meets their children and families' needs.
- Build Upon our Solid Foundation: We will build upon the successes of Minnesota's past and current system, lessons from other states, and the expertise and research in the field.
- Uplift and Diversify the ECE Workforce: We will invest in our dedicated and capable early childhood professionals so that they have the opportunity to thrive and grow, and we will build and support a racially diverse workforce.
- Recognize Implementation Realities: We will recognize inherent system constraints while remaining responsive to local, state, and federal landscape changes.

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- Expect High Quality and Effectiveness: We will endeavor to create a high quality and effective ECE system that meets the needs of all of Minnesota's children and families, regardless of circumstance, knowing that the state's future workforce, economy, and resident welfare is dependent upon it.
- Design for Stability, Sustainability, and Positive Impact: We will work to support funding stability for providers, educators, and staff across mixed delivery settings to ensure better service for families.

Meeting #4 Minutes

Members took an informal vote to approve minutes from the February 22 meeting. The minutes were approved with 23 votes.

Definition of historically disenfranchised groups

Task Force co-chairs brought forward a revised recommendation for a vote:

Recommendation: Formalize the priority groups for consideration within Task Force planning, including:
- Racial and ethnic minorities, including People of Color and Indigenous people (POCI)
- Members of the LGBTQIA community
- Those experiencing multi-generational or ongoing trauma
- Those at risk of or with developmental delays or disabilities
- Those from homes where English is not the primary language
- Those experiencing homelessness or living in low-income households

With 9 voting members present, the vote passed with 9 votes in favor, no votes against, and no abstentions.

Recap of recommendations from legislators and stakeholders the plan must consider

At the February 22 Task Force meeting, three legislative members of the task force provided remarks, which were recapped for members:
- The plan and implementation timeline should be as specific as possible – recommendations should be clear about intent and purpose and should include details and data.
- The Task Force should engage with legislators and stakeholders through the plan development process. Continued buy-in from these groups will lead to a higher likelihood of success.
- There have been other task forces and councils that weren't able to achieve implementation of their recommendations because of a lack of consensus. That is something this Task Force should work to avoid.
- Working groups will be vital to meeting our timeline and goals. They will need to have specific tasks and work towards reaching goals.
- There is a large amount of expertise and experience, thoughtfulness, diversity, and knowledge on the Task Force. The group can harness that to produce a report that is actionable and leads to real change but needs to work toward finding consensus and agreement.

Representative Peggy Bennett introduced herself to the group as she has recently joined the task force.

Task Force members first saw the list of who has a stake in an effective ECE system in the February 22 meeting. They discussed the revised list of stakeholders: children, parents/families, providers, ECE workforce, businesses/employers, state of MN, and K12 & higher ed. Members suggested adding Tribal nations, and the indirect workforce behind the ECE workforce. A revised list will be voted upon at the next meeting.

Definition of effectiveness
Task Force co-chairs brought forward a revised definition of effectiveness for discussion:

In addition to being affordable and accessible, an effective ECE system centers child and family well-being. It does this by:
- Ensuring offerings address and advance the social, emotional, psychological, cultural, physical, and intellectual needs of each child to prepare them to transition to kindergarten.
- Providing safe, stable, secure, consistent, nurturing, and enriching environments for each child
- Building trusting relationships built on mutual respect between each family and their caregivers
- Promote culturally responsive environments with diverse staff that reflect the families they serve and the whole state.
- Connecting families to resources and supports *they* have identified will increase their family well-being

Members suggested adding "trauma-informed" and "linguistically relevant" to bullet point one. Members also suggested incorporating an emphasis on family choice in this definition. A revised definition will be brought by co-chairs for a vote at the next Task Force meeting.

Deep dive discussion: Access
Co-chairs brought forward a draft definition of an equitably accessible system for discussion:

- An equitably accessible system provides a clear process through which families can access affordable programs at all income levels and ensures availability in programs of family choice that meet individual child and family needs and expectations, given each family's unique context and circumstances

Members did not have suggested edits. This definition will be brought for a formal vote at the next Task Force meeting.

Task Force members broke into small groups to discuss access factors within the ECE system. Each group was given a specific access factor, problem to address, and long-term goal to reflect upon and discuss, answering the following questions:

- Have we correctly identified the problem to solve? How would you change this?
- Have we correctly identified the long-term goal/vision? How would you change this?
- What are some meaningful parts of the solution set that the group believes merit further investigation?

Group 1

Access factor: Availability (schedule & hours) and accessibility (geography, location) of early care and education that meets the diversity of families' needs.

Problem to address: Families do not have readily and consistently available access to child care that accommodates their schedule needs and/or is provided in a location that is convenient to their home or work location.

Long-term goal: All families, regardless of schedule and geographic location, have readily and consistently available access to child care that accommodates their schedule needs and is provided in a location that is convenient to their home or work location.

Discussion themes included:

- Overall, the group felt that the problem was correctly identified. However, they noted that it's hard to separate out this particular problem from the other groups' issues/problem statements.
- One member also notes that families with variable/fluctuating work schedules face a particularly challenging barrier, especially because many don't find out their schedule until a few hours before they need to be at work. This is outside of the world of child care—verges into employment laws and regulations that should be changed.
- Child care deserts are a real issue and it's unclear what is being done about it. Of particular note are tribal county service areas.
- There is a need to break down the barrier between child care and Family, Friend, and Neighbor care (FFN). The vision should recognize the important role that FFN plays in the system.
- The group wants to be realistic about parent choice—parents often prefer FFN care for alternative hour (nights and weekends) over licensed programs.
- The state should provide resources to FFN providers to help create quality options that meet parents' preferences, but there may be challenges in identifying FFN providers because they do not want to be regulated. Regulation is an issue when public money is available—but one to solve if we want to support families' choices.
- We need to use available data to understand what is out there, what is needed, and where it's needed. Need better understanding of what the state is already doing to know where the holes are.
- A potential idea is doing a public parent survey to assess wants and needs.
- Licensing reform is a key element to think about – ways to create greater child care supply by being creative. Making sure safety is a priority, but allow creativity in how/where to build more slots in different places.

Group 2

Access factor: The role local communities should have in both determining access priorities for their communities and how to meet access needs.

Problem to address: Decisions made at the state-level impacting availability of and access to child care do not systematically consider the needs and preferences of unique local communities across the state, potentially resulting in a mismatch of services available to services required or desired.

Long-term goal: Local communities have a meaningful voice in decisions about what services are provided, where and when, in order to ensure child care options meet local needs and preferences. Power is shared between the state and local communities to ensure this happens.

Discussion themes included:

- Overall, the group felt that the problem was correctly identified. However, they noted that we need to better define what we mean by "communities" – are these geographic, cultural, etc.
- The group agrees that specific context and needs must be considered when determining access priorities, but these will look different depending on the way we define geographies. Additionally, the way we define geographies will determine how community voice is represented and heard.
- An example was provided that some ethnic communities may prefer family members provide care, but policy limits the contexts in which this qualifies for assistance. A mechanism must exist for family priorities such as this to be heard and considered in policy. At the same time, the state is responsible for promoting access to the full mixed delivery system including group settings.
- The group also identified that different communities have different resources and starting points and this must be considered.
- It is important to utilize the strength of communities to recognize their own needs and develop their own solutions. Different communities also have different capacity to identify and advocate for their needs, and unique abilities to solve challenges in their own ways. However, we must ensure that whatever vision for community voice we develop improves equity rather than exacerbates it, given the different capacities and starting points. Equitable supports must be provided for this.
- The group believes many of the access improvement options raised in the survey merit consideration for expansion. However, further investigation is needed to understand effectiveness through data and evaluation, and also to consider potential implementation considerations or consequences.
- Additionally, the group appreciated other state examples that allowed for meaningful voice for communities. The solution must ensure that local communities have the ability to influence state policy. The state should determine what must be held consistent through policy and where there is flexibility that can allow tailoring to communities.
- The state should determine which Minnesota programs have been successful through an evaluation process, based on data, to determine programs we should invest in.

Group 3

Access factor: Resources and ability of providers to offer culturally responsive programming and environments.

Problem to address: Children and families want and need culturally responsive programming and environments, but the child care system at large does not have a clear and consistent approach to prioritizing and providing this.

Long-term goal: The State of Minnesota's child care system has a unified vision and approach to prioritize and provide culturally responsive programming and environments. This is developed and implemented in an inclusive manner.

Discussion themes included:
- Proposed edits to the problem statement:
  - Children and families want and need culturally and linguistically responsive programming and environments, but the early care and education system at large does not have a clear and consistent approach to prioritizing and providing this.
- Children and families want cultural responsiveness, but we are having difficulties recruiting for this in rural areas. Great goal to have, but somehow need to incorporate the challenge to the

workforce to meet this goal. We can't be what we can't see. Have we surveyed or do we have data that families want culturally responsive programming?

- These statements need to be embedded in equity. In an inclusive and equitable manner so that all children can be seen in.
- Knowledge and Competency Frameworks has been instrumental in establishing cultural competency professional standards. They exist across all settings, but people are not aware of these. A strategy could be a training on professional competency standards.
- Some providers don't know that the Knowledge and Competency Frameworks do count to their training hour requirements, but it can be confusing what these trainings mean and what are the requirements.
- Teacher training in a public system is in a different system, how do we make sure that this availability of content material are available to them also?

Group 4

Access factor: Transportation and other barriers, such as language barriers, affecting access to families' programs of choice.

Problem to address: Even when child care options exist, families still face systemic challenges accessing those options, such as transportation and language barriers, which limits family participation.

Long-term goal: Minnesota's child care system, in partnership with local communities, identifies, understands, and addresses family participation barriers at both the system and individual level.

Discussion themes included:

- The problem statement needs to better define "systemic challenges such as . . ." better. Just listing transportation and language barriers seems limiting. It may make sense to conduct family focus groups to better define some of the specific systemic barriers they face.
- The group identified other systemic barriers to potentially include here:
  - Ensuring language barriers are inclusive of ASL or hearing impairments
  - Accessing care if you are undocumented
  - Accessing care if you don't have access to health care (e.g. vaccines for children are required in many settings)
  - Caregivers who are not legal guardians; how can they access and advocate for kids in their care?
- Transportation is both a challenge (i.e. not having a car or access to public transportation is a hinderance) and a solution to Access Factor #1--geographic access to ECE locations (i.e. having access to a car or public transportation allows one to access care further from their home).
- The current long-term goal statement seems vague and doesn't tell us much related to the specific barriers of transportation or language. Can we make this more specific? Maybe something like, "All families, regardless of their transportation access or language barriers, can access quality ECE."
- The idea of having the state provide a navigator function to help families overcome some of these systemic barriers to participation and link them with resources. Navigation could include translation services, direction to the right resources, providing forms in their home language, etc.

Working Group and listening session share-outs

The Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group meeting on March 9 focused on:

- Understanding the compensation landscape for early childhood educators and staff.
- A review of some recommendations from the Transforming Minnesota's EC Workforce Project.
- Review of proposed wage scale.

Discussion themes included:

- Factoring in current economic situation (inflation, tight labor market) will be important as we consider recommendations. We may need to revisit previous calculations of a livable wage.
- The wage scale proposal is meant to close the gap between current wages for ECE workers and a livable wage. It compensates workers more for furthering education, which is meant to help with retention – it provides a growth opportunity in the profession.
- Most wage data only reflects those who are in the Unemployment Insurance Program (UI), this excludes many FCCs. How can we best capture data from FCCs, and how can we address their specific needs? They may not see themselves within the wage scale, because they are business owners and a part of the workforce.
- Potential solutions for business supports may include an ongoing stipend or monetary support delivered directly to providers.

The next Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group meeting will be on Wednesday, April 13 from 6pm-8pm.

The Family and Provider Affordability Working Group meeting on March 10 focused on understanding current benefit programs for families, including the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and Early Learning Scholarships.

Ideas discussed included:

- Explore broadening access to CCAP through adjusting entrance level income requirements.
- Explore broadening eligible activities to include: substance abuse treatment, commute time, more job search hours, considering domestic violence and mental health issues eligibility factors
- Family contribution levels seem too high, given current inflation. Lowering costs for all should be a priority.
- Families can use the entire amount of Early Learning Scholarships right away, or can use it to pay a smaller amount throughout the year. There are pros and cons with both approaches, and an approach that allows for the most stability is important.
- Scholarships are currently focused on 3- and 4-year-olds. Given what we know about brain development, scholarships should be eligible for children aged birth to five, because the earliest years are so developmentally important.

The next Family and Provider Affordability Working Group meeting will be on Thursday, April 14 from 1pm-3pm.

Task Force co-chairs held the first virtual listening session on Wednesday, March 23. Themes included:

- Broad support for goals of our work.
- Support for a proposal to create a mentoring program for providers and educators as a way to support professional development, networking, and growth within the profession.

- Ideas about supporting transitions from ECE settings to kindergarten – how can we partner to have bidirectional communication about children?
- Struggles with attracting and training the workforce, especially in rural areas. Higher education program closings have contributed to the issue, and folks are looking for creative solutions (online trainings, non-traditional classes, etc.)
- Exploring creative ways to provide benefits and supports to the workforce is important. Some ideas included a network of substitutes to allow for days off for PTO, sick days, holidays, and paid professional development days.

Timeline and next steps

As Task Force staff maintains and updates records of potential recommendations to include in Task Force deliverables, members of the public and members of the Task Force are asked to provide written input. Input can be emailed to GreatStart.TaskForce.MMB@state.mn.us.

 Draft timeline of work:
- Task Force Launch: November 30, 2021
- Work Groups begin meeting: February 2022
- Today's Meeting: March 29, 2022
- Research & Analysis in Work Groups with Task Force guidance: March – September 2022
- Draft recommendations and report completed: December 15, 2022
- FINAL Report submitted: February 1, 2023

At the next meeting, there will be three formal votes taken:
- Primary Stakeholders in the ECE System
- Effectiveness Vision
- Equitable Access Vision

Next Task Force Meeting: April 26, 2022, 6:00-8:00 p.m.