

Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force

Tuesday, April 26, 2022

6:00p.m. to 8:00p.m.

Virtual Meeting: WebEx

Also available by livestream to the public. Due to technical difficulties, the start of the livestream was delayed. Members of the public could view the stream starting at 7:56pm. Please refer to these notes and the attached slides for information about what was discussed. If you have additional questions after reviewing the content, please contact the Great Start Task Force coordinator at greatstart.taskforce.mmb@state.mn.us.

Task Force Members Present: Janell Bentz, Nicole Blissenbach, Lydia Boerboom, Shakira Bradshaw, Summer Bursch, Meghan Caine, Luciana Carballo, Oriane Casale, Kath Church, Cyndi Cunningham, Barb Fabre, Deb Fitzpatrick, Karen Fogg, Kraig Gratke, Nancy Hafner, Senator Karin Housley, Pat Ives, Brook LaFloe, Ann McCully, Jenny Moses, Missy Okeson, Suzanne Pearl, Clare Sanford, Lauryn Shothorst, Krystal Shatek, Sandy Simar, Michelle Trelsted, Amy Walstien, Jayne Whiteford, Cindi Yang

Task Force Members Absent: Representative Peggy Bennett, Representative Liz Boldon, Debbie Hewitt, Adriana Lopez, Rena Schlottach-Ratcliff, Tonia Villegas, Senator Melissa Wiklund (Note: legislative members were unable to join this meeting due to the ongoing legislative session)

Task Force Consultants Present: Katie Reed, Afton Partners; Ellen Johnson, Afton Partners; Gerald Liu, Afton Partners; Brytain Tate, Afton Partners; Kate Ritter, Children's Funding Project

Children's Cabinet Staff Present: Erin Bailey, Angela Butel, 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 three formal votes, a review of the plan for the work ahead, a deep dive into the draft recommendations around achieving equitable access, and report-outs from Working Groups.

Meeting #5 Minutes

Members took an informal vote to approve minutes from the March 29 meeting. The minutes were approved with 24 votes.

Primary Stakeholders in the ECE System

Please see the stakeholder wheel on slide 16. Task Force co-chairs brought forward a revised recommendation for a vote:

Recommendation:

- Children (in the center of the wheel)
- Parents/Families
- Programs/Providers
- Direct ECE Workforce
- Indirect ECE Workforce
- Businesses/Employers
- Federal, State, Local governments
- Tribal Nations

- K12 & Higher Education

With 10 voting members present, the vote passed with 10 votes in favor, no votes against, and no abstentions.

Vision for Effective ECE Services

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

In addition to being affordable and accessible, an effective experience centers child and family well-being through a system of choice. It does this by:

- Ensuring offerings address and advance the social, emotional, psychological, cultural, physical, and intellectual needs of each child, in a trauma-informed manner.
- Providing safe, healthy, stable, secure, consistent, nurturing, and enriching environments for each child.
- Building trusting relationships founded on mutual respect between each family and their caregivers.
- Promoting linguistically responsive and culturally relevant 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.

With 10 voting members present, the vote passed with 10 votes in favor, no votes against, and no abstentions.

Vision for Equitable Access to ECE Services

After receiving no edits since presenting this vision in the March meeting, Task Force co-chairs brought forward a recommendation for a vote:

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

With 10 voting members present, the vote passed with 10 votes in favor, no votes against, and no abstentions.

Working Toward Recommendations

The Task Force is charged with addressing the persistent challenge of affordable access to quality early care & education. Members reviewed slides 20-23, which include an overview of the charge, types of recommendations that may be developed, a recommendations frame, and an example draft vision, values, and belief statements.

- The Task Force is not addressing all problems in the ECE system, including challenges with early childhood special education, early intervention, home visiting, early childhood mental health, or other important programs and services
- The group will approach the charge by addressing its parts, and do so through an equity lens
 - Accessibility
 - Effectiveness
 - Affordability

- Sustainability (for providers, for the ECE workforce, and for the State)
- The Task Force has the option to make recommendations for other areas that must be considered or studied further.
- Task Force recommendations may include:
 - **Statements:** Task Force statements of vision or belief
 - **Directives:** Task Force recommendations for action
 - **Next Steps:** Task Force recommendations for further study or engagement
- A general frame for recommendations includes:
 - Vision, values, and belief statements
 - Under each priority area:
 - Long-term vision
 - Components of the “solution set”
 - Recommended sequencing or prioritization

Care is Education

In February, the task force voted to "Formally acknowledge our commitment to the Mixed Delivery System; all types of providers and settings provide value to families and children, and family preference must be honored and respected by design." Since that vote, there has been discussion around the importance of recognizing that care and education cannot be separated. Task Force co-chairs brought forward a new draft statement for consideration:

“All settings within the mixed delivery system offer both care and education to the children they serve. All childhood experiences in these settings are learning opportunities, and care cannot be separated from early learning.”

Discussion themes included:

- It is good that the support for the mixed delivery system means that we recognize all settings have value, including that all settings provide care that is education. No setting is more valuable than others.
- The phrasing of the statement needs some editing. While saying care is education, the statement itself separates those concepts. It also is not as nurturing as quotes we have seen from Task Force members:
 - "Every single experience a child has is a learning opportunity. Learning in Early Childhood is play and experience based."
 - "Children are always learning. Care and education cannot be separated."
- ECE settings of all types use play-based curriculum.
- In this statement, “care” means supervision and safety, not “doing the right thing”. It is important to recognize the benefit for families that is allowed by having their children attend ECE services (families can use time for work, education, activity, etc.). We need to communicate that education is embedded in all elements of early childhood programs, they are not simply offering supervision and safety.

Co-chairs have asked for further feedback on this statement and will bring a revised statement forward for a vote at the May meeting.

Building Toward Meeting Our Charge

Slide 25 features a visual that was first introduced in March, which reflects the foundation the Task Force must establish.

- At the foundation level, the plan is built on the Task Force guiding principles.
- The supporting processes and concepts, like the Equity Accountability Process, hold up the plan development components that are developed through ongoing task force discussions and the work that comes out of the two Working Groups.
- The combined efforts from these groups will support the equity-led goals that were established in legislation: affordability, accessibility, and a supported workforce. These goals are all components needed to meet the intended charge for this Task Force.

Equitable Access Draft Recommendations Package Discussion

In advance of the meeting, Task Force members received a document containing a recap of discussions around four access factors from the March 29 meeting. Members were asked to review the problem statements, long term goal statements, ideas generated, and ideas for further analysis. All four access factors were on the agenda to be discussed in this meeting, but due to time constraints, members were able to discuss two factors. Co-chairs have asked for additional review of all four access factors prior to the May meeting, including a call for suggested edits and additions that can be moved towards actionable recommendations.

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.

Access Factor 1: 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 early care and education 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 early care and education that accommodates their schedule needs and is provided in a location that is convenient to their home or work location.

Specific Pain Points

- Families with variable, fluctuating, and non-traditional work schedules that need last minute care have unmet needs.
- Child care deserts in rural and tribal county service areas.

Ideas Generated

- Incentivize non-traditional care hours by offering higher CCAP reimbursement rates for licensed and legally non-licensed care.
- Resources and support should be provided to FFN providers, with consideration to ease legally non-licensed requirements to meet parents' preferences and needs.

- Consider licensing modifications to increase available supply.
- Understand and systemically support parent choice patterns (e.g.-preference for FFN care over licensed programs for night and weekend coverage).

For Further Analysis

- Conduct a public survey to assess parents' wants and needs – type, location, hours, ages, etc.
- Use data to understand what capacity exists and service gaps, and determine priorities for investment.

Discussion themes Included:

- Suggested additions to “ideas generated”:
 - On-going resources to support new early care and education programs to startup, and existing child care programs to expand
 - On-going funding to recruit, train and support new, qualified early educators to join the field
 - On-going resources to support early care and education programs improve and expand their facilities.
- It would be good to see specific data around the need for non-traditional care hours.
- There is concern around the idea to “ease legally non-licensed requirements to meet parents’ preferences and needs”. Members were worried this may cause a safety concern, and pointed out that FFN requirements are already a low barrier to entry. There may be need to consider if ease to become certified rather than lessening requirements might be more supportive in this area. FFNs do offer care outside of traditional/standard hours, and should be supported, but not to the detriment of health and safety.
 - There needs to be clear delineation between "typical" service hours and weekend/overnight hours. Overnight care is important to families, and needs to be supported in appropriate settings.
 - There are also settings that are certified non-licensed settings where parents cannot be in a different building (for example, a business could offer on-site child care while parents are working).
- The group that developed these ideas spent a lot of time discussing schedule and hours, and less time addressing geography and location. More ideas need to be generated in that space.

Access Factor 2: 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 early care and education do not systemically 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 early care and education options meet local needs and preferences. Power is shared between the state and local communities to ensure this happens.

Ideas Generated

- Define what is meant by “communities” in order to determine access priorities and determine how community voice is represented and heard. Consider looking to PDG work for idea generation.
- It will be essential to consider how resources and ‘starting points’ are different among communities, in order to equitably support communities to identify and advocate for their needs.
- There must be an established mechanism for local communities to have meaningful voice and the ability to influence state policy.
- The state should determine where there is policy flexibility to allow tailoring at the local community level and what must remain consistent across the state.

For Further Analysis

- The state should study appropriate ways to view communities across the state in ways that are reflective of how communities organize themselves and that also leads to the ability to ensure comprehensive coverage in any future community-driven system.
- The state should study and evaluate which Minnesota programs have been successful through a formalized evaluation process, based on data, to determine programs we should invest in.
- Consider ways other states have organized for local voice, and the potential implementation considerations through stakeholder engagement.

Discussion themes Included:

- Suggested additions to “ideas generated”:
 - Expanded access to supports and facilitation of processes to help communities plan for child care needs.
- The group needs to define “community” and create a mechanism for community voice.
- Local employers or chambers need to be considered part of “community” definition, as many times these are catalysts for creating community solutions as well as offering support for these solutions.
- There is good work being done already in MN around community engagement in finding solutions, we should incorporate that existing work and success.

Working Group share-outs

Working group meeting dates, notes and live viewing information is available on the Task Force webpage: [Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force / Minnesota Management and Budget \(MMB\) \(mn.gov\)](#).

The Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group meeting on April 13 focused on:

- A review of the compensation landscape for early childhood educators and staff.
- A review of current recommendations.
- Developing goals for future recommendations from this Working Group.
- Brainstorming non-wage compensation proposals.

Themes included:

- At a minimum, the workforce should receive a livable wage, comparable across settings, with an adequate benefits package.

- Any proposal is meant to bring lower wage earners up to a higher wage, not take higher earners down to a lower level – no one currently making more money than outlined in a proposal should take a pay cut.
- Compensation should reflect the importance of ECE educators in educating children and supporting the larger economy. This is both the right thing to do and a practical solution for workforce recruitment and retention.
- Early childhood professionals should be supported in earning early childhood credits and degrees.
- Changes would be incremental in getting pay closer to parity with elementary teachers. The legislation requires the Task Force to “set compensation for early childhood educators by reference to compensation for elementary school teachers” as part of their plan and implementation timeline that will phase in between July 2025 and July 2031. This group must think about big end goals and the smaller incremental steps to get there. It can be a challenge to do both – dream big, while recognizing implementation realities.
- The idea of a prevailing wage (used in the construction industry) may be a good idea to explore as it relates to ECE. A small group will meet to discuss this further and bring information back to the Working Group.
 - Someone working at a center- or school-based setting is considered an employee, and therefore a clear payment/benefit stream is present. Special considerations will need to be made for Family Child Care providers, who are both a business owner and a member of the workforce. Other business owners will also need to be considered.
- It is important to consider the potential of a benefit cliff – if compensation rose enough, it may make members of the workforce ineligible for public benefit programs they currently utilize. There are potential strategies to mitigate that, which should be explored.
- Different settings (and people working in different roles within those settings) may need different benefit options. A cafeteria plan is a benefit plan that allows staff to choose from a variety of benefits, and that style of benefit plan works well for the ECE workforce. Some employees may need reduced rates for their own children to attend child care, while some providers or employees may need health insurance because they are not able to get coverage in another way. Some teachers need prep time, but assistants wouldn't need that time. Allowing choice from a menu of benefits could be very valuable.

The next Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group meeting will be on Wednesday, May 11 from 6pm-8pm.

The Family and Provider Affordability Working Group meeting on April 14 focused on a discussion of the themes that arose from the March meeting around benefit programs for families, including the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and Early Learning Scholarships.

The group also contemplated recommendations through a 'system of abundance' lens.

- How can we braid funding sources in a way that serves more families? Can we shift that burden to the state, away from individual families who are working to apply to multiple programs and parse different eligibility requirements?
- Figuring out how to raise rates and lower co-pays in all areas of the state is important. This could be through a whole-system change, or incrementally.
- Simplifying the benefits system is also a workforce recruitment and retention issue. It is challenging for providers and families alike, which does not invite new people to the field.

Themes included:

- Expand eligibility for CCAP by adjusting income requirements or increasing eligible activities.
- Reduce co-payments to improve affordability for lower- and middle-class families.
- Address variation in program administration through clear policy, process, and training.
 - Could we build from the Preschool Development Grant (PDG) regional hubs or the Early Learning Scholarship area administrators to administer CCAP? Is there a regional administration model that could work in conjunction with county administration? The goal could be to create multiple points of entry for families seeking assistance.
- The CCAP waitlist needs permanent reprioritization as a short-term solution to serve more families. The long-term goal should be forecasting the program so all eligible families who want to take part in the program are able to.
- This group is thinking of solutions that could provide immediate, incremental change, as well as longer-term ideas that would change things drastically.
- Increase scholarship funding to cover the full cost of care, or, in the absence of increased funding to cover the full cost of care, promote stability and continuity of care.
- Expand scholarship age eligibility to include birth-3.
- Simplify the administrative system and reduce burden.
- As we explore potential changes to CCAP and Early Learning Scholarships, we need to keep in mind they are two parallel programs that serve overlapping populations but have different administration and eligibility requirements. To best serve the most families, we need to keep in mind:
 - If CCAP were fully forecasted, scholarships may not be as needed. An exception is that Early Learning Scholarships can serve families who cannot meet the activity requirements of CCAP (working, looking for work, or schooling).
 - If CCAP were fully funded, how can we re-work the early learning scholarships program to serve those who aren't eligible for CCAP? Can we think of creative and flexible solutions to get support to the most families?

The next Family and Provider Affordability Working Group meeting will be on Thursday, May 12 from 1pm-3pm.

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: April 26, 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

Task Force co-chairs will hold the second virtual listening session on Tuesday, May 24 from 6-7 PM. The link to join is available on the Great Start Task Force webpage: [Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force / Minnesota Management and Budget \(MMB\) \(mn.gov\)](https://www.greatstartmn.gov/Minnesota-Management-and-Budget-(MMB)-(mn.gov)).

The slides indicate that formal votes will take place in May around the “care is education” statement and the access recommendations package. Due to the robust discussion under time constraints and the need for further discussion, the vote on the access recommendations package will be delayed to a future meeting.

Next Task Force Meeting: May 31, 2022, 6:00-8:00 p.m.

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