

Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force

Tuesday, May 31, 2022

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

Virtual Meeting: WebEx

Also available by livestream to the public.

Task Force Members Present: Representative Peggy Bennett, Janell Bentz, Nicole Blissenbach, Shakira Bradshaw, Meghan Caine, Luciana Carballo, Oriane Casale, Kath Church, Barb Fabre, Deb Fitzpatrick, Karen Fogg, Nancy Hafner, Debbie Hewitt, Pat Ives, Brook LaFloe, Ann McCully, Jenny Moses, Suzanne Pearl, Clare Sanford, Rena Schlottach-Ratcliff, Sandy Simar, Michelle Trelsted, Amy Walstien, Senator Melissa Wiklund

Task Force Members Absent: Lydia Boerboom, Representative Liz Boldon, Summer Bursch, Cyndi Cunningham, Kraig Gratke, Senator Karin Housley, Missy Okeson, Adriana Lopez, Lauryn Schothorst, Krystal Shatek, Tonia Villegas, Jayne Whiteford, Cindi Yang

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 one formal vote, a discussion of building toward an actionable plan, discussion of draft recommendations from the Workforce Compensation and Supports and the Family and Provider Affordability Working Groups, continued discussion of the Equitable Access draft recommendations, and a share-out from the May 24 co-chair listening session.

Meeting #6 Minutes

Members took an informal vote to approve minutes from the April 26 meeting. The minutes were approved with 20 votes.

Care is Education

In April, Task Force co-chairs brought an initial statement regarding "care is education" for consideration and discussion: "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." After discussion during the April meeting and further feedback from members, Task Force co-chairs brought forward a revised recommendation for a vote:

Recommendation:

- "Every single experience a child has is a learning opportunity, making care and education inextricably intertwined. All settings within the mixed delivery system offer safety, supervision, and education to the children they serve. Learning in early childhood is based in play, interactions, and experience, and care and education cannot be separated."

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

Building Toward an Actionable Plan

At the February Task Force meeting, members heard from legislators serving on the Task Force regarding how to build towards an actionable plan that will be well-received. A summary of those comments is on slide 17. One theme that arose during that meeting was the importance of reaching consensus and finding agreement. Slide 18 shows an agreement scale that can be used as members evaluate their position on any draft recommendations. Task Force co-chairs do not expect that all members will agree on everything all the time, which could indicate the group is not considering all stakeholders and their needs. In order to reach consensus, all task force members must engage with the work and provide feedback and ideas. Slide 19 contains an update regarding the 2022 legislative session.

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 and the Family and Provider Affordability Working Groups brought draft recommendations for consideration by the full Task Force to this meeting. These items are in line with the direction shared in the March and April full Task Force meetings, and they will be brought forward for a formal vote in June.

Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group

The Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group meeting on May 11 focused on:

- Reviewing the Minnesota Early Care and Education Wage Scale proposal published by DEED
- Introducing non-wage compensation ideas, including policies around health care, retirement savings, paid time off, income disregards, professional development, and substitute pools.
- Aligning on long-term compensation package recommendations
- Identifying short-term compensation recommendations

Draft financial compensation recommendations are on slides 25 and 26. Slide 29 shows Working Group discussion themes around short-term financial relief strategies, and slide 30 has a summary of ongoing discussions around benefits for the early care and education workforce.

Discussion themes included:

- The consideration of Family Child Care providers is very important, given their unique positioning as business owners and providers of care. It is good to see the recommendations include a wage floor for these providers.
- There are connections to workforce qualifications and educational pathways for workforce members.
- Work is being done to expand the understanding and support of the Power to the Profession Unifying Framework.
- It is important to recognize the value of competencies and experience in addition to formal education.
- Short term financial relief strategies need to be considered to bridge the gap to a long-term plan.
- Increasing workforce access to benefits will serve as a recruitment and retention strategy, creating a supported workforce.

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

Family and Provider Affordability Working Group

The Family and Provider Affordability Working Group meeting on May 12 focused on an impact assessment of a set of draft family affordability recommendations, as well as a discussion of how families currently access benefits.

Draft long-term family affordability recommendations are on slide 34, draft short-term recommendations for Child Care Assistance are on slide 35, and draft short-term recommendations for Early Learning Scholarships are on slide 36.

Discussion themes included:

- There was a clarifying question regarding whether the long-term recommendations include eliminating early learning scholarships. The working group answered that the long-term thinking is around making the early care and education system affordable for all families, and that a large expansion of benefits to support middle-class families may eliminate the need for the scholarships program as it currently is structured. The short-term recommendations include an expansion of the scholarships program (current state) in order to meet the needs of more families until the long-term affordability vision is achieved.
- One example shared was an existing free PreK program at a public school that attracts families not served by the district for K-12, but who open-enroll in the PreK program in order to access free services. Making all programs more affordable may help with this problem, as families will not need to look outside of their district to find affordable early care and education services.
- More funding in the system generally should meet the needs of families by allowing them to choose between programs that they can afford, which will make flexibility for parents more possible.
- A question was asked regarding how the 250% of SMI eligibility benchmark was developed. The response was that given current cost of care, a family making 250% of SMI would be paying about 7% of their income on early care and education services. The proposed recommendations include eliminating co-pays for families making below poverty level wages, up to 7% of income co-pays for families at the higher end of the income scale.
- A reminder was given that 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. It is important to consider all perspectives and how to empower families to make choices that meet their needs.
- A parent perspective was shared regarding the current level of funding and assistance not helping those in the middle class who struggle to pay for early care and education. Parents are considering dropping out of the workforce or going into debt to pay for care, which is why the work of this Task Force is important to address affordability for all families.
- One important question is how to transition between short- and long-term recommendations. The Task Force will need to work on an implementation plan that bridges the gap between short- and long-term solutions.
- The focus of this Working Group so far has been on family affordability. The group will also work to address affordability for providers, including funding streams, as that is an important piece of the overall system of affordability.

Slide 38 contains questions carried forward from the working group that will be addressed in later meetings. The next Family and Provider Affordability Working Group meeting will be on Thursday, June 9 from 1pm-3pm.

Equitable Access Draft Recommendations Package Discussion

Slide 42 includes a timeline of the development of the draft recommendations regarding equitable access. In advance of the meeting, Task Force members received a document containing the draft package of recommendations for review.

In April, the voting members of the Task Force approved this vision for equitable access to early care and education services:

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.

Slides 43-54 include the draft package of recommendations regarding equitable access. Members reviewed the content and were asked to provide feedback, and there was no verbal discussion during the meeting. Co-chairs plan to bring these draft recommendations for a formal vote in June.

Listening Session Share-out

Task Force co-chairs held the second virtual listening session on Tuesday, May 24. Participants included center directors, family child care providers (current and former), a Parent Aware quality coach, and public sector employees.

Themes included:

- Recognizing increased mental health and behavioral issues for children in ECE settings, and the need for increased mental health supports for both children and members of the ECE workforce.
- Support for increased funding into the ECE system from the government – recognition that the current business model doesn't work well for families or the workforce.
- Suggestions to look at other models for ECE, including outside of the U.S. (Norway, Finland, Italy) and other states who have clear resources for families and providers (Wisconsin).
- Benefits and higher wages are needed as a recruitment and retention strategy. Participants shared worries about staff leaving the workforce, and younger generations not being interested in entering the workforce due to lack of competitive wages and benefits (health care, retirement savings).
- Some specific recommendation ideas:
 - Making sure to address language barriers between licensors and providers, ensuring communications are clear
 - Increasing mental health services for providers, including for their own mental health and training for addressing mental health of children
 - Reserve a pot of funding to be used for children entering foster care to ensure no waitlists for them to access benefits (CCAP and ELS)
 - Simplify the process of navigating resources for both families and providers

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: May 31, 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, Task Force co-chairs anticipate bringing forward draft recommendations for a formal vote:

- Access Recommendations Package
- Workforce Financial Compensation Recommendations Package
- Family Benefits Recommendation Package

Next Task Force Meeting: June 28, 2022, 6:00-8:00 p.m.

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