

Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force

Tuesday, January 25, 2022

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

Virtual Meeting: WebEx

Also available by livestream to the public.

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

Task Force Members Absent: Adriana Lopez, Amy Walstein, Jayne Whiteford, Patricia Ives, State Representative from Minority Party

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 and went over the agenda for the meeting. The agenda included revising the guiding principles for Task Force work, a discussion of the success points of today's system, a discussion of program effectiveness for children and families, and the planned approach to our work ahead.

Meeting #2 Minutes

Members took an informal vote to approve minutes from the December 21 meeting with no opposition.

Revised Guiding Principles

Guiding principles reflect the Task Force's values and beliefs, guide how it operates, and lay a foundation for decision-making. After discussion of proposed guiding principles at the last meeting, Task Force co-chairs brought forward the following revised draft guiding principles:

- **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.

- Expect High Quality and Effectiveness: We will endeavor to create a high quality and effective ECE system that meets the needs of Minnesota's children and families, 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.

Discussion of these principles included the following themes:

- We must emphasize services for all families, including those who currently may not qualify for assistance programs, including parenting teenagers, immigrant parents and children.
- Government services need to center children and their needs.
- We should prioritize the needs of the youngest children, from infancy to 3 years.

Equity & Access Discussion Outcomes

The Task Force spent time in the December meeting on a discussion to define equitable access. The following themes were identified:

- Navigating the ECE system is not easy for families and administratively exhausting. The system is disjointed.
- Culturally responsive programming is essential, and it requires recruiting people of color to ECE careers.
- The lack of transportation is limiting access for families to get to their ECE setting of choice.
- A stable, nurturing, safe, and loving environment where families feel a sense of belonging is needed in all ECE settings.
- Staffing challenges are a major contributing factor to access.
- To meet the various needs of families we need a more transparent and connected system of family supports.

The following factors must be considered in the Task Force plan regarding equitable access:

- Accessibility and ease of the process through which parents determine eligibility, identify options, and secure early care and education.
- Availability (schedule & hours) and accessibility (geography, location) of early care and education that meets the diversity of families' needs.
- The role local communities should have in both *determining access priorities* for their communities and *how to meet access needs*.
- Income eligibility requirements that lead to public subsidy access for early care and education.
- Resources and ability of providers to offer culturally responsive programming and environments.
- Transportation and other barriers, such as language barriers, affecting access to families' programs of choice.

Today's system success points

Before this meeting, Task Force members were invited to take a survey to identify success points in the current ECE system. Success points identified in the survey included:

- Mixed delivery system (x7)
 - Choices for families, not one size fits all
 - Honoring cultural and racial differences
 - Holistic understanding of child development
- Dedicated leaders who strive to improve experiences for families (x3)
- Parent Aware (x3)
 - Best practices in action

- Flexible options for families, including hours (x2)
- Dedicated and skilled staff (x2)
- Quality of education (x2)
- Safe environments
- Support systems and services for low-income families

Discussion of these system strengths included the following themes:

- There are many good things about the ECE system today that we should build upon, not reinvent.
- There is broad support for a true mixed delivery system. We should make sure funding streams truly align with this support, including all types of settings.
- There are dedicated and skilled staff, which has been especially true and important during the pandemic. Staff have truly helped Minnesota's children get through the pandemic, going above and beyond.
- More discussion needed on flexible hours, how to serve families who need care during "non-traditional" work hours.
- There needs to be a cultural change regarding respect for the ECE workforce. People are leaving the workforce to pursue other careers due to lack of care and respect. The system does not work well for the workforce.

Effectiveness goals for children and families

The Task Force broke into small groups to discuss effectiveness and quality within the ECE system. Each group was given a family scenario to reflect upon and discuss, answering the following questions:

- Why is this family choosing ECE? For what purpose(s)?
- What would an effective program look like for this child and family to meet their needs?
- How would you define success for the child/family experience?

Groups were encouraged to imagine answers that could exist outside of the current ECE system, without worrying about scarce resources. The discussion was robust, and led to a few key themes:

- Logistical considerations for families provide barriers and opportunities
- Factors surrounding child well-being are very important to success and effectiveness
- Environments need to provide enrichment, safety, security, and trusting relationships
- Parent well-being is important for the whole family – we recognize needs beyond child care

Group 1 discussed this family scenario:

- Steve and Anna are a couple in their mid-20s who live with their children, Maya (3) and Roberto (1), in Hopkins. Both parents work full-time and qualify for Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) based on their income level. Maya was enrolled in a child care center at three months old, but co-payments proved to be a financial strain for the family and quality of care did not match the family's preferences. They disenrolled Maya at 9 months old, and Steve stayed home during the day and worked part-time overnight while Anna was home. This arrangement continued after Roberto was born when Maya was almost 3. Steve and Anna are concerned about Maya and Roberto not having interaction with other children.

Group 1 shared the following reflections:

- The family is facing significant financial strain and looking for affordability. They are also considering the social aspect – the need for engagement and interaction for their children.
- They need access to programming that fits the needs of their children. That could look like a program for both children at same time, covering both age groups.

- The group had a conversation around mixing and matching funding streams to make care more accessible, ensuring funding is flexible for family needs.

Group 2 discussed this family scenario:

- Katelyn is a working single mother of four children, living in Rochester. Katelyn needed to obtain housing and support services as she was experiencing homelessness and leaving a domestic violence situation. She and her children first moved in with Katelyn's mother and applied for and received assistance to get Section 8 housing, which allowed them to rent an apartment. Katelyn and her family qualified for Head Start based on income eligibility, and her youngest child, Jessica (3) is now enrolled in Head Start and attends a licensed child care center while Katelyn works. Jessica's older siblings attend public school during the day.

Group 2 shared the following reflections:

- It would be good to simplify access to services – this family needed to access Section 8 and Head Start. A single point of access would be good.
- This family needed to prioritize safety and stability.
- The children should have access to early childhood mental health services. Connection and security are important, given their experience of trauma.
- We should envision a system that can provide developmentally appropriate care wherever and whenever it is needed, and meet families where they are.

Group 3 discussed this family scenario:

- Flora and Brad live in Elk River with their two children, Alex (4) and Lucy (2). Childcare in the area was prohibitively expensive for Flora and Brad, and Flora's mom (who is unemployed due to a disability) takes care of both children. Flora's mom lives nearby, is a trusted family member, and speaks both English and Khmer, Flora's native language. Alex and Lucy are learning Khmer, and they have a great bond with their grandparents. Flora and Brad have concerns that Alex and Lucy may be missing out on social interactions with their peers, daily enrichment activities like art and games, and fostering independence at an early age.

Group 3 shared the following reflections:

- Something that could be challenging for these children as they go to kindergarten is adjusting to change and exposure to multiple adults who are not a close bonded family.
- A potential ECE option that could work well could be a part time program that provides peer interaction.
- A program could bring enrichment activities to this FFN setting, rather than expecting the children to leave the setting.

Group 4 discussed this family scenario:

- Betsy and Paul live in Saint Paul with their son, George (2), who was born early. Betsy had always planned to send her child to a child care program at either a center or family provider setting, but is now concerned about George's immune system and his health. Paul's mother has offered to take care of George, so he is currently being cared for by family, but Betsy and Paul are also worried about social interaction and development.

Group 4 shared the following reflections:

- This family is seeking health and well-being for their child, while exposing him to positive social and emotional development opportunities.
- Characteristics of an effective setting for this child could include a spread out space, with a combination of indoor and outdoor learning environments. There needs to be a solid foundation in health and safety for all children and staff.

- A trusting and strong relationship with educators is important.
- Part time care situations might work better for this family, potentially including early childhood family education.
- It would be great to provide a “matchmaking” service between FFN and families seeking care and time for respite.

Group 5 discussed this family scenario:

- Michelle is a single mother from Minneapolis who moved to Duluth with her four children while leaving an abusive partner. When she arrived in Duluth five years ago, she applied for assistance programs for herself and her four children, Devon (10), Jeffrey (9), Shayla (3), and Madelyn (2). The family qualified for Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Devon and Jeffrey went to public school and attended after-school care while Shayla and Madelyn went to a family child care program. At times, her four children were in three different programs, which caused transportation and scheduling challenges. Michelle started her own business before getting a temporary job at a local college, where she eventually enrolled in classes. She now has a full time, permanent position at the college and the family is no longer receiving CCAP.

Group 5 shared the following reflections:

- Systems should consider the impact of trauma when families apply for assistance.
- This family faced challenges with the children being placed in separate settings, which could be solved if transportation could be provided from K12 schools to family child care providers.

Group 6 discussed this family scenario:

- Marisa is 20 years old and co-parenting with her boyfriend Travis, with whom she has two children, Jaden (4) and Harper (2). Marisa and Travis were 16 when they had Jaden, at which point Marisa left high school and moved in with Travis and his mother. The family qualified for Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). Using CCAP, Jaden and Harper are enrolled in a Parent-Aware rated child care center. Marisa is pursuing her GED in order to open up additional job opportunities.

Group 6 shared the following reflections:

- This family needs wrap-around programming to ensure the young parents have a voice and can use it.
- It is important to have navigation centered programming, so these parents know how to use system after they are done with school.
- These children have exposure to other children, peers, and facilitators.

Working Groups

Two working groups of the Task Force have been established and will meet monthly, beginning in February. The working groups will take direction from the full Task Force and research, analyze, and bring proposals to the Task Force regarding key topics and questions. Membership is as follows:

Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group

Name	Position
Adriana Lopez	Early Childhood Educator - Licensed Center
Ann McCully	Child Care Aware of Minnesota
Cyndi Cunningham	MN Child Care Provider Information Network
Debbie Hewitt	Department of Education
Jenny Moses	Children's Cabinet

Krystal Shatek	Director of Licensed Child Care - Metro
Lydia Boerboom	Kids Count on Us Representative
Meghan Caine	Early Childhood Educator - Public school-based
Melissa Wiklund	MN State Senator
Michelle Trelsted	MN Community Education Association
Nancy Hafner	Faculty Rep
Nicole Blissenbach	Department of Labor and Industry
Oriane Casale	Employment and Economic Development
Pat Ives	Director of Licensed Child Care - Greater MN

Parent and Provider Affordability Working Group

Name	Position
Cindi Yang	Department of Human Services
Clare Sanford	Minnesota Child Care Association
Deb Fitzpatrick	Statewide Advocacy Organization
Janell Bentz	Department of Revenue
Jayne Whiteford	Parent Children Under 5 - Greater MN
Liz Boldon	Representative, MN House
Missy Okeson	Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs)
Shakira Bradshaw	Parent Children Under 5 - Metro
Summer Bursch	Minnesota Association of Child Care Professionals (MACCP)
Tonia Villegas	Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators
Kath Church	Family Child Care Program License Holder - Greater MN
Brook LaFloe	Tribal Representative with Expertise in Early Care and Education

Equity Framing

The co-chairs brought forward a proposal for framing Task Force discussions in an equity lens, and to ensure Task Force work is accountable to the commitment to driving toward equitable outcomes for Minnesota’s children and families.

The proposed framing includes this definition of “historically disenfranchised children and families”:

- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Those at risk of or with developmental delays or disabilities
- Those from non-English speaking homes
- Those experiencing homelessness or are living in poverty

After discussion, the Task Force asked to add those who experience acute and/or multigenerational trauma to the definition of historically disenfranchised children and families.

As Task Force work progresses, the co-chairs are asking Task Force members to pose the following questions:

- Did we:
 - Center children and families?
 - Pay particular focus to the needs and priorities of historically disenfranchised children and families and their communities?
 - Specifically contemplate how our decisions may benefit or harm historically disenfranchised children and families and their communities?

- Seek the expertise and input from stakeholders already doing the work in historically disenfranchised communities?
- Where possible, consider data that provides insight into the relative impact on historically disenfranchised children and families and their communities?

Stakeholder Engagement

The goals of stakeholder engagement are to engage the broader ECE community of advocacy groups, professional organizations, and community members by:

- Sharing progress of Task Force work
- Gathering input on the components of the plan
- Providing transparency to build trust and support

Our stakeholder engagement plan includes the following roles:

- All members should engage in personal engagement with the communities, advocacy groups, professional organizations, and other stakeholder groups to which they belong by sharing status updates, receiving feedback, and reporting back to the task force.
- Task Force co-chairs will host quarterly virtual listening sessions to share progress and gain input from key stakeholder groups.
- The Task Force coordinator will engage in ongoing and ad hoc engagement of ECE organizations to share progress and gain feedback.
- There will be a monthly electronic newsletter sent to interested parties who want to be regularly updated on Task Force progress.

Next Steps and Close Out

Draft timeline of work:

- Task Force Launch: November 30, 2021
- Today's Meeting: January 25, 2021
- Work Groups begin meeting: February 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

Parent and Provider Affordability Working Group Meeting: Tuesday, February 15, 1:00pm-2:00pm

Workforce Compensation and Supports Working Group Meeting: Wednesday, February 16, 4:00pm-5:00pm

Next Task Force Meeting: February 22, 2022, 6:00-8:00 p.m.