

Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

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

Virtual Meeting: WebEx

Also available by livestream to the public.

Task Force Members Present: Patricia Ives, Krystal Shatek, Kathleen Church, Jayne Whiteford, Shakira Bradshaw, Sandy Simar, Adriana Lopez, Meghan Caine, Brook LaFloe, Jennifer Moses, Representative Liz Boldon, Nancy Hafner, Deb Fitzpatrick, Suzanne Pearl, Lydia Boerboom, Missy Okeson, Cyndi Cunningham, Michelle Trelsted, Ann McCully, Clare Sanford, Tonia Villegas, Debbie Hewitt, Oriane Casale, Karen Fogg, Cindi Yang, Nicole Blissenbach, Laurena Schlottach-Ratcliff, Kraig Gratke, Senator Melissa Wiklund, Lauryn Schothort, Amy Walstien,

Task Force Members Absent: Barb Fabre, Janell Bentz, Luciana Carballo, Summer Bursch, Senator Karin Housley, State Representative from Minority Party

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

Children's Cabinet Staff Present: Erin Bailey, Angela Butel, Hannah Quinn

Welcome, Agenda, and Reflection on Meeting #1

Task Force members reviewed virtual meeting protocols and went over the agenda for the meeting. The agenda included a discussion of scope, revisiting the charge, plan objectives, and required considerations, considerations for equity and access, and a proposal and discussion of guiding principles.

Task Force members reviewed and adopted the below meeting norms and expectations:

- Members attend meetings prepared and on time
- Engage in respectful dialogue
 - Everyone's input is important
 - Assume best intent
 - Listen with an open mind, and for commonalities
 - Don't say or type anything you wouldn't want to have shared in public
- Be actively engaged
 - Don't just disagree, offer a doable alternative idea
 - Speak to the point on the floor
 - Apply your expertise and networks
- Confirm decisions as we go
 - Strike a balance between gathering input and moving forward

Members took an informal vote to approve minutes from the November 30 meeting with no opposition.

Themes from Meeting #1

- Embrace the Momentum
- Prioritize Equity
- Ensure Sustainability of Solutions
- Strengthen the Workforce

Questions from Meeting #1

- Task force tactics:
 - What do the outcomes of this taskforce look like?
 - How will the outcomes lead to something actionable?
 - How will this task force ensure its recommendations are heard?
 - How are we going to get buy-in from the various stakeholders?
 - How will we determine our focus areas and priorities?
- Policy and implementation:
 - How will we pay for this?
 - How can agency doors be more open to a variety of providers?
 - How do we make sure that we do not lose the connection of the work to K-12?
 - How will Build Back Better affect our work and recommendations?
 - How can the childcare workforce be viewed as educators?
 - How do we create coherence around how families access the system?

Scope discussion: what is and is not included in our charge?

Task Force members discussed the scope and focus of work while reflecting on a diagram that showed the interconnected systems affecting children and families. Task Force work is focused on Early Childhood Education & Care. Other systems the work is connected to, but that do not fall within scope of Task Force work include Economic Supports, Child Welfare Services, Community Services, Mental Health Services, Health Care.

Revisiting our charge, plan objectives, and required considerations

The Task Force will be developing an implementation plan which will start July 2025 and finish no later than July 2031. The plan must address:

- Affordability - create system in which family costs are affordable
- Equity and accessibility
- Workforce compensation

Task Force members discussed the required considerations included in the establishing legislation regarding each of these topics.

Required considerations from establishing legislation regarding affordability:

- Benefit mechanisms and infrastructure for family financial assistance.
- How the plan will be administered, including the roles for state agencies, local government agencies, and community-based organizations.
- How provider payment rates will be determined and updated.
- Identify how to maintain and encourage the further development of Minnesota's mixed-delivery system for early care and education, including licensed family child care, to match family preferences.
- Include an affordability standard that clearly identifies the maximum percentage of income that a family must pay for early care and education.

Affordability discussion themes:

- We need to identify an affordability standard for families, an income percentage cap.
- We need to demand quality for our children but to elevate quality, it will cost more. How do we ensure those costs don't land on families?

Required considerations from establishing legislation regarding ensuring a supported workforce:

- Endeavor to preserve and increase racial and ethnic equity and diversity in the workforce and recognize the value of cultural competency and multilingualism
- Include a salary floor that supports recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce in every setting
- Consider need for/development of a mechanism that ties provider reimbursement rates to employee wages
- Increase compensation to incentivize advancements in relevant higher education credentials, training, years of experience, and credential equivalencies, including certified demonstrations of competencies
- Set compensation for providers by reference to compensation for licensed early childhood teachers
- Consider differentiating base compensation for varying levels of responsibility and different geographies

Supported workforce discussion themes:

- Early Childhood Education (ECE) providers are under-appreciated, under-compensated, and are not provided the same respect as other educators.
- Children benefit when there is stability in the system for continuity of care, but conditions lead workers to leave the field, leading to lack of stability.
- The lack of financial support has reduced the workforce pipeline and dissuades potential workers, including people of color, from joining the ECE workforce.
- Potential financial supports for workforce: loan forgiveness, tax credits, insurance coverage, benefits, increased compensation
- To increase cultural competency and culturally relevant opportunities for children, we need to recruit more people of color to the workforce.
 - Higher education programs need to support this work.

Considerations for Equity and Access

There are no required considerations surrounding equity and accessibility included in the legislation. Members discussed shared definitions and then met in small groups to discuss what considerations should be included in their work.

Shared definition of equity, adapted from Early Childhood Systems Reform report:

- When every person, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, or geographic location has the opportunity to realize their full potential of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive well-being, without limits imposed by structural inequities.
- Equity is ensuring everyone has what they need to be successful. This is different from equality which involves treating everyone the same.

You have adequate access to early childhood care if:

- It is in a location that works for you or your family
- It is open the hours you need
- There is availability for your age group
- It is affordable for you
- It is culturally relevant to your needs
- It serves your child's individual needs (e.g., English language learners, children at risk of developmental delays or disabilities, etc.)

Factors that contribute to equitable access include income level, geography, quality, transportation, individual needs, race and ethnicity, location, schedule & hours, and age of children.

Themes from small group discussions:

- Families need support in navigating the childcare system, including being aware of what is available and how to access options and available supports. Regulations and paperwork can be prohibitive to access.
- Lack of transportation options for families presents large barriers.
- Workforce shortage and staff turnover contributes to disparities. Many families send their children to the first available slot, rather than being able to have the choice to consider other factors (cultural competency, location, etc.)
- The Task Force should look at these issues through the lens of a child.

Guiding Principles

Guiding Principles reflect the Task Force's values and beliefs, guide how it operates, and lay a foundation for decision-making. The Task Force co-chairs brought forward the following draft guiding principles:

- **Promote Equity:** We will prioritize a system that promotes equitable outcomes for ALL children.
- **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 the ECE Workforce:** We will invest in our dedicated and capable early childhood professionals so that they have the opportunity to thrive and grow.
- **Recognize Implementation Realities:** We will recognize inherent system constraints while remaining responsive to local, state, and federal landscape changes.
- **Prioritize Family Perspectives, Needs, and Choices:** We will prioritize families' perspectives, needs, and choices as we make recommendations to improve the system.
- **Expect High Quality:** We know that the future of Minnesota's workforce, economy, and resident welfare is dependent on a high quality ECE system.
- **Design for Stability and Sustainability:** We will work to support funding stability for providers, educators, and staff across mixed delivery settings to ensure better service to families.

Themes from discussion on guiding principles:

- Need to develop a shared understanding of the solid foundation of Minnesota's past and present current system, lessons from other states, and the expertise and research in the field.
- In addition to prioritizing family needs and choices, work should focus on the priorities of broader communities.
- Task Force should prioritize evidence-based solutions and practices.
- Racial equity and diversity in the workforce needs to be more explicitly called out in principles.

- Acknowledge the intersecting elements of the broader systems that effect and influence early childhood education. Field
- Stability and sustainability guiding principle helps the ECE workforce as well as children within the system, who benefit from stable environments.

Next steps and close out

Task Force members should fill out Work Group Interest Survey by January 7, 2022.

Draft timeline of work:

- Task Force Launch: November 30, 2021
- Today's Meeting: December 21, 2021
- Work Groups begin meeting: January – 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

Next meeting: Tuesday, January 25, 2022, 6:00-8:00 p.m.

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