



Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) Meeting Minutes

September 12, 2023 – 9 a.m. to Noon
Report Development Session | Virtual Meeting

Welcome, Virtual Meeting Protocols and Introductions

DCYF Community Engagement Managers Emily Morgan and Eric LaFontaine welcomed attendees, walked through virtual meeting protocols, and initiated introductions.

FSKA Recommendation Report

DCYF Community Engagement Managers Eric LaFontaine and Emily Morgan led the group through a discussion regarding the draft ELAC Recommendation Report.

- [Draft ELAC FSKA Recommendation Report](#)

<p>Discussion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does anyone have a current list of the ELAC membership? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Here is the ELAC roster. <p><u>Investing in Childcare and Early Learning</u> <i>Increase supports for Early Learning Centers to address behavioral issues.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An advocacy seat is needed. • Special Needs is a category of kids and is in federal legislation. There are organizations in our community that focus on kids with special needs and there are different funding streams as well. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is special needs the best word to use here? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I think it's both. What we hear from the field is that there are a lot of kids with behavioral issues that need additional support in the classrooms. I've also heard that children with special needs aren't being served. ▪ I agree. Behavioral issues are not always special needs. Behavioral issues can be based on many things. We need the support to understand how to work with children or how to set up a behavioral plan versus how to refer a child. ▪ Increase support for early learning centers to address behavioral issues and students with special needs. It should be both. • I think behavioral issues can be something different from special needs or children with disabilities. It feels like any child could have behavioral issues. It would be nice to define what the terms mean. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I don't think behavioral issues can be separated from special needs. They work together. What I have seen over the years is we don't always include mental health support. Mental health consultants are not necessarily coordinating with early intervention providers who are there supporting special needs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Should it state early intervention? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, that would be great. • Providers don't have staff that have training to navigate the behavioral issues. It is really hard to hire and retain people when they don't have the skills and knowledge to navigate behavioral issues in the classroom and respond appropriately. Providers need additional money for training.
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- I agree wholeheartedly. What Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants (IECMHC) like myself do is provide training and support to staff - because they are the ones who are there all the time.
- Circling back to behavioral issues. Yes, special needs is a euphemism for disabilities. There's a large movement in disability studies and in the community that saying anything other than disabled gives the word a negative connotation.
 - However, behavioral issues sound like we're teetering on pathologizing children. So, I agree on the word change to early intervention but would add the word supports.
 - Thanks for the clarification on terminology. I didn't think behavioral issues covered it but didn't know the negative connotation with special needs.
 - Maybe "provide" versus "address" early intervention services/supports/environments.
- Children will be going to a developmental preschool and have a lot of support but that support does not follow them to the childcare center. There is a huge gap in resources, and we need to figure out how that support can continue and how more children can qualify for services.

Partner with county or city government to have a Teacher's Aid navigator at local levels who has connections and an understanding of local Early Learning communities and the issues providers face.

- Is there any process to decide if these are items that are wanted?
- Can you expand on this recommendation?
 - There isn't a lot of collaboration between school districts and childcare providers. This is intended to bridge that gap.
 - There is a disconnect but there are existing coalitions throughout the state that have relationships with school districts and early learning providers. I'm not sure making a government position to liaison is a solution. A better solution would be finding a mechanism in areas where collaboration is not happening or having conversations with coalitions to identify existing relationships and partnerships.
 - I agree. Let's support and build upon the work already going on in the community.

The department could provide more opportunities to connect with families to help them understand what early learning is and how the process can differ for alternative, unlicensed care.

- There are already a lot of resource navigation programs out there. Most of that work is significantly underfunded. I see this as looking for more robust funding to make sure this is a reality in all communities.
 - I agree. We can be much more effective by building upon the relationships that communities have with families and caregivers as opposed to something statewide.
 - Do you think the role should be, rather than connect with families, to educate them on the value of family friend neighbor (FFN) services, licensed care, and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) programs versus unlicensed care? It sounds like the department is trying to have more conversations rather than provide educational resources to families.



- Yes, but statewide entities trying to do things in the community don't work well. We need to build the capacity of communities to help families to understand what resources are available.
 - The resource navigator concept fits with the referral work going on through Washington Communities for Children (WCFC).
 - I agree. Maybe this is the need for an education campaign or communication toolkit that could be used in different communities to get the word out about options for parents. Communities could build upon it with information about subsidies or tuition relief for families.
 - Another thing to consider with communication is how information is disseminated across the state. People in Vancouver don't necessarily receive the same information as those in Spokane for example.

Work with OSPI aids to ensure one-on-one aids follow the child to their after-school program and work with OSPI, behavioral providers, and youth development programs to ensure preventive supports and activities are high-quality, consistent, and align between the school day and after school as well as between the school year and the summer.

- This is a funding request, and this is a partnership that would have to be developed with OSPI.
- The concept of having support wherever the child is going is a great idea, but we have to be careful about having any kind of requirement that it's the same person that follows the child. It can get complicated when you have people following the child from programs who don't work in the childcare setting. There are a lot of different expectations and there can be a misalignment of roles. There needs to be funding to provide the services in-house.
 - It's important to train people in-house, especially in rural areas to build up capacity in the local system. Can this be tied into the pyramid model implementation that the state is doing?
 - In the childcare aware system, there is regional work going on in ESD 112.
 - ESD 114 is doing the pyramid model implementation.
 - I agree, a large barrier here is there is no mechanism currently for funding to transfer between the programs, but this alludes to the need for funding to follow the child.
 - Many people cleared to work in K-12 settings would not be cleared to work in licensed childcare either.
 - There is also a limit on the number of hours a day that a person can work.
- Can the term 'behavioral health providers' be more specific? Sometimes we end up with paraprofessionals or behavior-specific professionals instead of licensed mental health professionals when not specifically asking for those.

Work with the legislature to fund incentives and develop more opportunities for local school districts and Early Learning communities to communicate and collaborate from an educator perspective.

- This could almost be combined with the previous one. There is some undertone to these suggestions due to the transition to kindergarten (TK) because there is verbiage that states this collaboration should be happening. There should be coordinated efforts to figure out



options for children and TK should only be serving children who do not have other access to early learning. We know that is not really happening currently. There needs to be direction from the legislature to make it very explicit that the K-12 system should partner with early learning.

- I see this recommendation as allowing early learning educators to access professional development opportunities offered to school districts. Also, a pathway for early learning educators to collaborate with teachers in programs that children move between.
- All funding requests should automatically be a legislative ask.
- What do we mean by the same opportunities available to local school districts and early learning communities?
 - Make sure there are STARS hours available to the staff. K-12 professionals have the summer off to do training while early learning professionals are hourly and lose time at work when training or paying out of pocket.
 - Mostly around professional development. School districts have opportunities that aren't available to outside private early learning organizations.

Before grant applications go live, DCYF should connect with the community to address any equity and access concerns.

- We need to make sure applications are translated so that everyone can access them at the same time.
- Could there be a standing "grant application review committee"? Standing so that they are readily available if funds need to be dispersed quickly. This committee could be really supportive of DCYF's intentions of getting funds out equitably.
 - If there are applications that are submitted in different languages, there should be native speakers on the review committee.
- Maybe create a list of who should see the grants and ensure the grants are sent out to current contacts on those lists. WCFC coalitions could help with making sure everyone is contacted.

Develop a webpage to monitor the use of grant funds.

- Can you expand on this? Is the recommendation saying DCYF has a certain amount of money and how much has gone out? Or is this how the money is being spent by grant recipients?
 - I believe it could be both but is more so how DCYF is rolling out the money.
 - I've heard requests for how the funds were used and how it changed something within a program. Providers have also requested grant recipient names. That is typically a public records request for centers, but we don't share licensed family homes due to privacy protections.
 - I think it's always valuable to have information on the impact of funding in the field.
 - For those who haven't visited the page before, here is the [existing grants landing page](#) on the DCYF website.
- How will the webpage monitor the use of grant funds?
 - [Child Care Stabilization Grant Awards Dashboard](#)
- Can the information be in one place so we're not bouncing between websites and dashboards? Instead of creating something new, can we take what we have and just add more information to it?
 - What is missing that you'd like to see? And how can we share provider stories in a way that is cost-effective?
 - Yes, maybe just adding more granular information to the dashboards.



Expanding Access to Child Care and Early Learning Programs

Streamline Income Eligibility between ECEAP and working connections.

- What is the end goal? Is the intention that the same levels of income have access to both of these programs? Or is it that anyone at certain thresholds would go to ECEAP versus working connections? Is the intention to have one program serve one income bracket and the other service a different one?
 - Let's streamline a lot of things so that families have a one-stop shop where they can put their information in find out all the local programs and services that they qualify for and pick what's the best fit for their family.
 - When you look at income eligibility state median income (SMI) charts, they are different. I don't know if they are looking at different years, but they should be the same.
 - DCYF is currently looking to make the charts the same tables for SMI.
- This is a topic that has family focus and provider focus sides to it. The whole goal is to get kids into programs that they're eligible for. I think not only is it about streamlining but it's about connecting up ECEAP and working connections to make sure kids are getting into eligibility programs. We need to ensure eligibility is clear, so children are placed easily into early learning programs.
- A chart that also shares income-related information for Head Start, Home Visiting, and other programs would be hugely helpful to families seeking support.
 - Also including exceptions to the income rule, like special needs.
- Here is the [WCCC SMI chart](#) and [ECEAP SMI Chart](#).
 - There is another chart that shows dollar amounts (similar to the ECEAP one). Those are the incomes that show different amounts.
- Are we just talking about income alignment eligibility or are we also potentially talking about some of the other factors that could make a child eligible for working connections?
 - Income alignment is a lot clearer language than "streamline" to me at least.

The Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) rate increase mandated by FSKA should be increased beyond the 85th percentile.

- At what point is the percentile rate changing to the cost of care?
 - It is a process. We just received approval from Region 10 to move away from the market rate survey and are doing a cost of quality care study. We have recommendations due to the legislature for the 2025-2027 session related to this and this is required by FSKA.
- Support steps that will cause DCYF to transition away from a market rate model of reimbursement to a cost of quality reimbursement.
- The collection of capital gains dollars was promised to be used for early childhood. We know the legislature is not necessarily doing that. I think we should use explicit language regarding the capital gains tax expenditures. 500 million annually should be spent on early learning as promised and ELAC should take a very strong stance on this.

Consider the impact of benefits programs. Different subsidy streams should be braided, so they are working together to support the parent and provider.

- This can go down two pathways. There is the issue of a parent understanding when they will lose eligibility. Another pathway is asking the legislature to expand access to have a softer landing. Both pathways are important to address.
- I think changing the cliff to a descending slope is very important.



Increase the number of preschool programs at local public schools. This will help prepare kids for kindergarten and provide families with early access to all the resources/assistance that local public schools can provide.

- There are a lot of people in childcare who feel like there's been too much expansion of preschool into the K-12 system.
 - Expand the number of preschool programs where other early learning programs are not available. Sometimes K-12 preschools get put in places where we already have a very rich early learning environment available.
 - The school district preschool programs have improved kindergarten readiness for kids who come from lower demographics like refugee or immigrant families.
- Perhaps just leave off the "at local public schools."
- DCYF should be supporting and helping move forward the programs that we've worked so hard to establish that are high quality.
 - DCYF leadership is a direct hire from the Governor, so I think the issue lies with the Governor's view of preschool and childcare versus OSPI offering those.
 - We may not have new staff in the Governor's office after Inslee.
- In order to have parent choice really be an option to go to childcare centers, FFN, and local TK programs, we need to focus on funding streams and how they are utilized around our state.

To measure and define "stabilizing the early learning field", DCYF could analyze the rate of providers who are closing each month and track whether licensed providers have returned to pre-COVID enrollment levels.

- We need to make it more actionable around what we're trying to do. We need a clear understanding of the impact of COVID, why providers exist in the field, and how to return to pre covid enrollment levels.
 - There are serious staffing issues. Providers have a licensing capacity larger than what they can currently serve because they don't have staff.
 - That circles back to the need to compensate and provide staff with the support and education that's needed to navigate the challenges in classrooms.
 - The capital gains tax was supposed to be a vehicle for increasing compensation within the field.

Make data available on the amount of stabilization funds invested into each program type broken down per licensed capacity, the number of kids served, and by the number of early learning professionals employed at each learning facility.

- This gets at wanting the data accessible so that it shows dollars were not allotted based on this important criteria. There were more dollars given to family home providers per child served than dollars given to a childcare center per child served. The dollars were not dispersed equitably.
 - Significantly more per child.
- I remember hearing with the Department of Commerce facility grants, larger entities like corporate childcare or school districts could apply and be successful while smaller centers or family homes were not.
 - That is true of many grants. There is an equity issue. Large corporations have access to grant writers or full-time staff versus a single childcare provider applying.
 - Yes. That continues to be a problem in our area.
- It's a big problem when people at DCYF or Commerce, with no lived experience, are making decisions about supports that are needed so that childcare providers can access



grants and utilize funds but are not getting any provider input on the process. Provider's voice needs to be included at the beginning.

Qualitative data should be included: the "why" needs to be a part of the process to determine where and what resources are needed.

- Often time there is data with a number of unserved kids in a community, so they start up a program without knowing more information about the kids. Do we know whether they're from families that are income-eligible for ECEAP and would benefit from having a home component to the services? Do we know whether they can afford childcare?
- State of the Children reports do this well! In that, they share stories that highlight the numbers shown on the report.
- Ensure that reports and data that is shared with the community include both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a clearer picture of what is happening.
- Looking at quantitative data as well.
- Did you look at who received equity grants? Are there commonalities between recipients, like do they have grant writers? Push DCYF to ask more questions about the data. Who didn't get in?
- Providers need to be included in the development of grants.

Closing Remarks/Adjourn

Next Steps/Follow Up

- The Community Engagement team will send out a survey for members to prioritize the remaining recommendations for discussion.
- The next ELAC Public Meeting will be on October 3, 2023.

Members in Attendance:

Gary Burriss, Colleen Condon, Danielle Rasmussen, Debbie Ham, Deborah Sioux Lee, Deeann Puffert, Heidi Scott, Jen Sandvig, Kathy Carman, Lois Martin, Mary Rulewicz, Michelle Perez, Milan Mulye, Nancy Spurgeon, Samantha Masters

Members Absent:

Aida Rodriguez, Alexandra Martin-Truesdell, Ami Magisos, Angelica Hernandez, April Shiosaki, Astrid Newell, Carlina Brown-Banks, Catherine Duffy, Cheryl Smith, Christianna Clinton, Claudette Lindquist, Debbie Carlsen, Enrica Hampton, Grace Yoo, Isis Lara Fernandez, Jasmin Schmidt, Julie Rolling, Kathy Goebel, Kimberly Hoover, Luz Gomez, Nucha Isarowong, Olivia Burley, Representative Mari Leavitt, Ryan Guzman, Sen. Claire Wilson, Samantha Bowen, Shereese Rhodes, Susan Yang, Val Arnold, Valisa Smith