

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission
October 21, 2008
10:00 am
Minutes

Members Present: Debbie Malone, Janice Dancer, Eleanor Coleman, Jeff Maneth, Debbie May, Suellen Ward, Paulette Smith, Marilyn Chambers, Nikki Hammontree, Amy Denton, Jerry Hudlow, Jody Edrington and Barbara Gilkey.

Members Absent: Richard Nugent, Dee Cox, Missy Duke, Bruce Cohen and Evelyn Bass

I. Call to Order/reading of Mission Statement

The October 2008 meeting of the AECC was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Debbie Malone, Chair. A quorum of members was present. Debbie welcomed the four newly appointed Commissioners and asked the members present to read the Mission Statement together.

II. Approval of minutes

Minutes from the July 2008 meeting were reviewed. Suellen Ward noted that she was absent from the July meeting and with this amendment, she moved acceptance of the minutes. The motion carried.

III. New Business

No new business was discussed.

IV. Old Business

Nominating Committee Report

Janice Dancer reported for the Nominating Committee, recommending that Barbara Gilkey serve as chair of the AECC. Motion was seconded by Debbie May and carried. Barbara Gilkey accepted the chair position and stated she would do her best to represent the Commission and greatly appreciates their trust.

Governor's Work Life Initiative

Geania Dickey shared an overview of the Governor's Work-Life Initiative. The project is an outgrowth of the Corporate Champions for Children recommendations and has expanded each year since it's inception in 2003.

V. Division Reports

A. Staff Introductions

No staff introductions were made.

B. Director's Report

Tonya Russell, Director DCCECE recognized several newly appointed Commission members. Recently appointed to the Early Childhood Commission are the following:

- Paulette Smith, Superintendent of the Fouke School District, serving by appointment of the Senate Children and Youth committee.
- Marilyn Chambers, Superintendent of the Hamburg School District, serving as a representative of the public schools.
- Nikki Hammontree, Director of Small World Preschool in Mountain Home, serving as a representative of private child care providers.
- Amy Denton, Owner of a child care in Conway offering out-patient services to children with special needs. Amy is representing the business community.

All other AECC members introduced themselves.

Tonya reported that Sam Lamey, CFO for the Division had recently retired. She is in the process of interviewing for his replacement and hopes to have someone on board in the near future.

As follow-up to the NGA Early Childhood Meeting at the Harvard Center for the Developing Child, several goals were established in consultation with national experts. The Arkansas team was composed of: State Representatives Eddie Cheatman and Nancy Blount, State Senator Shane Broadway, former State Representative LeRoy Danjeau, Kathryn Hazelett, Governor's Policy Director; Emily Jordan-Cox Governor's Policy Assistant Director and Tonya Russell, Director DCCECE. The three specific goals established address Brain Development training, Quality Rating and Improvement System implementation and Foster Care issues related to early care and education. As these goals are further refined and implemented additional information will be shared with the AECC.

Several national initiatives were shared with the members, these included the National Women's Law Center proposal (supported by over 50 national organizations) "A Vision for Reauthorization of CCDF". Senator Blanche Lincoln has supported an increase in the CCDF funding and is a sponsor of the Pre-K Federal legislation. As the CCDF reauthorization is being considered, many national groups are supporting increased funding as CCDF has not received an increase in several years.

The Arkansas Legislative session will begin in January. The Division is not asking for new funding, but is hopeful that current levels will be maintained. An increase in the ABC budget may be possible to provide COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) for staff. The Division's budget did include \$1.4 M to support the continuing level of CCDF funding. The \$1.4 would serve as match and maintenance of effort funds, replacing funds previously received from the Beer Tax and certification of ABC funds. Although an increase in funding is not

included, the Division has requested additional appropriation allowing expenditures for grant possibilities and to ensure the ability to expend the uncapped Special Nutrition funds.

The Department of Human Services will be focusing on three areas during the coming legislative session, the System of Care related to mental health services, Foster Care and Medicaid.

C. Report Updates

Information Technology/Integrity

Paul Lazenby provided an update on the three major IT projects in process. CLEAN/Licensing and Accreditation is under redesign and will incorporate background checks and the QRIS information. A final product is anticipated by January of 2010.

KidCare is the IT system related to child care vouchers. The system is being reworked to complete automatic defoliation if billing has not occurred within 60 days of the voucher expiration date. Work continues to clarify methods of verifying social security numbers as the current departmental agreement addresses only the Medicaid program.

SNP has implemented an on-line application process and the on-line billing is in production. In the future all claims and inspections will be electronic.

Mike Saxby reported that with tighter budgets, there is an increased focus on accountability on ensuring that funds are being spent on eligible clients.

Arkansas Better Chance

Jamie Morrison reported that a new ABC Specialist has been hired in the Harrison area. John Barron will be working with ABC programs in the NW/NC part of the state. A full listing of all ABC funded programs was provided to the Commission. The ABC Procedure Manual is now available on-line. The ABC Coordinator's training and COPA training are being offered electronically and a monthly Q&A session for ABC coordinators has also been implemented.

Licensing/Quality Accreditation

As a result of recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for School-age and Summer Programs, the licensing unit will be establishing separate standards for licensure for school age programs. At this time the school age sections are being pulled from the Child Care Center requirements. David Griffin reported that they do not expect to promulgate these standards unless there are significant changes.

Rules related to the Clean Air Act and the Emergency Preparedness Act is in the development phase.

The Licensing Unit has undertaken a special project at the request of Janie Huddleston, Assistant Director Department of Human Services. Janie is currently

serving as Interim Director of Division of Children and Family Services and has requested the assistance of the Licensing Unit related to Foster Care operations. Staff from licensing has been reassigned to conduct Child Abuse Neglect investigations, review case records, visit foster homes and make recommendations regarding changes in the foster home approval processes. There is a possibility of all monitoring of approved foster homes being conducted by the licensing unit beginning in July of 2009. Almost 1/3 of the licensing staff has taken on special assignments and is expected to continue this assignment until April.

Early Childhood Health

A summary report was provided in the briefing packet.

Special Nutrition

Curtis Curry reported that from 2002 to the end of the 2008 Federal Fiscal Year, the SNP unit has doubled their expenditures of federal funds for special nutrition reimbursement without the addition of new staff. In 2002 expenditures totaled \$23M and in 2008 funds expended totaled \$40M. As the new Federal Year began on October 1, 2008, 95% of all SNP applications are completed on-line, 50% of all SNP billing is completed on-line and by summer of 2009, all staff reports will be electronic.

The Summer Feeding program has shown a 20% increase in meals served from 2007 to 2008.

Child Care Development Fund (CCDF)

Plans are being made to hold several public meetings to gather input as the CCDF State Plan is prepared for 2009-2011. The plan must be submitted by July 1, 2009. Notification will go to all AECC members regarding the local meetings.

A team within the Division has designed a plan to review and self-assess client approvals for vouchers, this is an Improper Payments project required by Health and Human Services. This Self-Assessment/Review will continue through February 2009. Findings will be presented to HHS and shared with the Commission. These findings will serve as guidance for needed policy adjustments.

Family Support

Ivory Daniels explained that voucher authorizations are being closely monitored due to the very tight budget restrictions. Approximately 150 children are rolling off the system on a monthly basis, but there continues to be a waiting list for services currently at 7,600.

Program Support

Kathy Stegall addressed several issues provided in the briefing packets; the report to Legislative Council for the AR 2008 Guarantee Loan Fund was reviewed, as were recommendations from the Governor's Task Force on Best Practices for

School Age and Summer Programs. The School Age recommendations will be implemented as feasible over the next year without additional funding.

It was reported that during the past year over 1,500 workshops/training sessions had been held with attendance of over 25,000. These sessions included the curriculum areas of Frameworks, Pre-K Ella (literacy), INDEX (math and science) and the newest sessions addressing Social Emotional Learning for Young Children (SEL). These Professional Development activities support increased quality of care for young children. The long awaited **Adventures for Toddlers**, an on-line curriculum for teachers of toddlers is now available.

VI. Information and Other Business

Debbie May expressed her appreciation to the Division for those representatives that met with NW AR Early Childhood Providers. Barbara Gilkey reminded the members that the Kids Count Pre-Legislative conference is being held on Thursday and encouraged their participation. She also reported that UAMS has a new grant related to Lead Education. Barbara agreed to submit an article for the Early Childhood Newsletter.

A working group was appointed to plan for an AECC Retreat, members included Debbie Malone, Debbie May, Jody Edrington, Janice Dancer and Amy Denton. Further plans will be developed and shared with the Commission.

There were no public comments.

The next AECC meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2009.

VII. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn made by Debbie Malone and seconded by Jody Edrington.