

**Arkansas Early Childhood Commission**

**July 17, 2007**

**10:00 am**

**Minutes**

**Members Present:** Bruce Cohen, Joan Harper, Jerry Hudlow, Dick Nugent, Janice Dancer, Jeff Maneth, Brian Faulkner, Karen Marshall, Karen Massey, Debbie Malone, Paul Human, Debbie Mays, Jody Edrington, and Jeri Cummings (representing Dee Cox)

**Members Absent:** Laura Sparks, Doretha Davis, Hallie Sanford

**I. Call to Order/reading of Mission statement**

The meeting was called to order by Debbie Malone, chair of the Commission. A quorum of members was noted. The mission statement of the Commission was read.

**II. Approval of minutes**

Minutes from the April 17, 2007 meeting were reviewed. Karen Marshall requested that page 2 be corrected to reflect her statement, “providers are notified of de-obligation and or removal of clients” in the voucher program.

Motion was made by Richard Nugent and seconded by Jerry Hudlow to accept the minutes with the noted correction. Motion carried.

**III. Public Comment**

In response to concerns voiced at the April meeting, members reviewed AECC Policy and Procedures, section 5.2 Public Notice. This section provides for allowance of public comment in all meetings of the Commission and states that the chair is responsible for determining when and length of public comment allowed. Time limits may be designated. The chair reported that the public comment period would be scheduled after all reports are presented. A sign in sheet was available for persons wishing to address the Commission.

**IV. New Business**

Tonya Russell introduced two newly appointed Commissioners, Jeff Maneth a parent from Hope and Debbie Mays a family child care provider from Siloam Springs. Other visitors were also welcomed.

Geania Dickey reported to the Commission on a series of roundtable forums jointly sponsored by the Division and the AR State Head Start Collaboration office. Meetings were held in Hope, Harrison, Batesville and Fort Smith to discuss challenges; concerns and possible solutions to the rapid expansion of early care programs in Arkansas. Discussions were positive and methods to implement the recommendations are being developed. A follow-up report will be presented at the October Commission meeting.

## **V. Old Business**

### **Nominating Committee report**

Joan Harper brought a motion to the Commission from the nominating committee that Debbie Malone continues as chair for a second term. The nominating committee consisted of Joan Harper, Karen Massey and Hallie Sanford. There were no nominations from the floor. Paul Human seconded and the motion carried.

### **Outstanding Early Childhood Professionals of 2007**

Five outstanding professionals were recognized by the Commission.

Dean Pratt, Lavaca; Mindy Shaw, Batesville; Sharon Coburn, Osceola and Laurie Payne, West Memphis were introduced, received plaques and were honored by the Commission. Christina Meister, Springdale was unable to attend but had previously received the award during a ribbon cutting ceremony for a new pre-K building in the Springdale School District.

### **Arkansas Out of School Network**

**Lights On Afterschool** will be celebrated on October 18, 2007. A technical assistance call open to all school age providers in Arkansas is being held on August 14 at 10:00 am. The work of the AOSN continues with the Governor proposing to appoint a Task Force to study the issues related to after school and out of school time care and bring back recommendations regarding quality and funding. The task force is expected to begin their work this fall. A state wide conference is scheduled for September 14 and 15, 2007 at the Cooperative Extension office in LR. Kathy Stegall reported that with the extensive and rapid growth of early care funding and services, emphasis is now being directed to children and youth programs to ensure high quality care in out of school time settings.

## **VI. Division Reports**

### **A. Staff Introductions**

Mike Saxby, Compliance Unit introduced two new staff members: Sharron Brooks and Candice Akins.

### **B. Director's Report**

Tonya Russell referred members to the written report in their briefing packet. She noted that the increased preK funding of \$40 million is being obligated in several phases and anticipates all funds being committed by September. The CCDF grant has been flat-funded for the past several years, the beer tax sunset as of July 1, 2007 and there has been no TANF transfer of funds since 2004. (Sam Lamey will provide additional information on a proposed TANF transfer request.) These financial constraints have placed challenges on budgeting for the 2008 fiscal year.

These constraints forced the Division to re-institute the limitation of two staff per program to receive CPR scholarships. Debbie Malone shared that the AR Department of Labor can provide CPR and First Aid training at a cost of only \$10 per person. Options to re-establish the use of AR Department of Labor as a CPR provider will begin with a report on progress coming to the October meeting.

To ensure adequate communication between meetings, a monthly email communication will be sent to all commissioners between meetings. Additional methods of improving communication between the Division and providers include posting notices on the license web site, voucher/billing web and on the SNP billing site. This will be specific to issues in these program areas, but will increase lines of communication.

An afternoon session has been planned to provide an in-depth discussion regarding the environment rating scale (ERS) application, reliability and accountability issues. All members are invited to stay for this opportunity to interact with staff from the licensing/quality approval unit, ABC unit and our ERS contractors.

Tonya reported that plans are being made for an extended meeting in October to allow for strategic planning. Details will follow.

### **C. Finance Report**

Sam Lamey, CFO reviewed the end of 2007 fiscal report and provided information on the 2008 budget. He also re-enforced the challenges faced due to no TANF transfer since 2004, no increase in CCDF, sunset of the Beer tax and no increase in the allowable administrative funds for management of the ABC program.

Karen Marshall questioned the growing commitment to Foster Care vouchers, which now exceeds the previous \$1 M dedicated from the Division. Sam reported that a request is in process for the Division of Children and Family Services to commit funds above the initial \$1M for voucher services to Foster Children.

Karen Marshall asked for additional information on the reduction in funds for CPR grants in comparison to CPR grants issued last year. She further asked that efforts be made to increase the grants per program if possible or to look for other solutions.

Changes in the Quality Grants and Enhancement Grants were also presented. Quality grants are being reduced slightly due to a significant increase in numbers of programs meeting quality accreditation Quality. Enhancement grants will only be available to programs attempting to meet or maintain quality status or to programs correcting licensing deficiencies. These changes are reported in the Early Childhood Letter.

#### **D. Early Childhood Health**

Martha Hiatt spoke of the important link between Health and Early Childhood Education issues. She reported on the ABCD project and formation of a statewide steering committee to guide the work.

#### **E. Licensing Update**

David Griffin reported that work on technology issues within the unit continue as workers are implementing use of the tablet computers for licensing visits. A survey has been sent to all licensed programs to gauge satisfaction with the licensing process, over 3,000 were mailed and responses have been received from over 1,000. Results have been positive. A complete report will be made at the October Commission meeting.

The AR Department of Labor has recently implemented enforcement of a “boiler inspection” law which includes an inspection fee. Additional information will be provided in October.

#### **F. Special Nutrition Update**

Curtis Curry reported that the SNP applications are available on-line and that the monthly SNP billing will be available on-line by June 2008 or earlier. Curtis acknowledged the work of the staff in SNP unit and the remarkable growth in the program with expenditures of \$23 million in 2003 and expenditures of \$36.3 million in 2006.

#### **G. ABC**

Paul Lazenby reported that Ron Hunter in DHS Audit is development an audit compliance manual for use by ABC programs; this will provide guidance for allowable expenditures. Karen Marshall asked that a provider committee review

the recommended allowable expenditures proposal. Debbie Malone suggested using the Finance Committee to review the basic rules before promulgation.

Round two of ABC program recommendations are to be considered at the August State Board of Education meeting. Then a determination will be made as to whether additional rounds of applications will be issued.

ABC guidance regarding transportation has not changed, but Head Start will no longer be able to count parent transportation as matching funds. ABC will consider whether to make a change in counting parents transportation as match next year.

A Zero to Three Partnership project has been initiated in Arkansas. The Partnership provides extensive training related to Child Abuse and Neglect for a cross sectional group including early childhood professionals, mental health professionals, Division of Children and Family Service staff and licensing specialists. This team of professionals will be trained as trainers during the first week in August and subsequent sessions will be offered through out the state.

#### **H. Family Support**

Ivory Daniels reported that the Child Care Development Fund State Plan has been submitted for federal review. New Family Support Unit Policy is under consideration and a public hearing will be held on August 17, 2007.

#### **I. Compliance Unit**

Tim Lampe referred to the voucher expenditure report and further stated any future TANF transfer would include a designation of 6% towards quality projects. Work is underway to establish an on-line application process for grants related to the Quality Rating System.

#### **VII. Information and Other Business**

Debbie Malone requested a Commissioner volunteer to replace Hallie Sanford on the Finance committee. Karen Marshall agreed to serve on the Finance committee

The next AECC meeting is scheduled for October 16, 2007 and will include the final recommendations from Keystone on the Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System Evaluation project.

Meeting was adjourned.