



Leadership Council on Early Years Virtual Meeting Meeting Minutes

October 26, 2023

9:00 – 11:00am

YouTube Link for Guest Observers: <https://www.youtube.com/live/oiETTUS-Vsl?si=d2u0Qfcf1p30bgwl>

Members Present: Emilie Amundson (Secretary, DCF), Peter Barca (Secretary, DOR), Kathy Bilek (Legislative Liaison, DOT), Kathy Blumenfeld (Secretary, DOA), Kevin Carr (Secretary, DOC), Linda Hall (Executive Director, OCMH), Missy Hughes (Secretary, WEDC), Joseph Hoey (Assistant Deputy Secretary, DVA), Julie Majerus (Environmental Policy Advisor, DNR), Elmer Moore (Chief Executive Officer, WHEDA), Rebecca Murray (Executive Director, CANPB), Jill Underly (Superintendent, DPI)

Others Present: Jason Bierbrauer (DCF), Priya Bhatia (Division Early Care and Education Administrator, DCF), Catherine Haberland (Assistant Deputy Secretary, DFI), Tracy Luber (Regional Director, WEDC), Jane Penner-Hoppe (DCF), Cari Redington (Research and Policy Division Administrator, DOR), Jayne Wanless (Policy Advisor, DHS)

Welcome and Introductions

- Secretary Amundson welcomed the council, and the meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM. Attendance was taken.
- Secretary Amundson shared that while there is a Department of Children and Families, there is a myriad of ways that the other Departments support kids, families, and communities in Wisconsin.
- Shared preview of meeting topics, including updates and technology features for DCF to share with the group and a panel presentation to talk about what one community is doing to build out rural child care capacity.

Updates and Discussion

- Secretary Amundson shared update that the Governor's office announced \$170 million in emergency funding to support Child Care Counts. This investment is an example of connecting the dots in practice.
 - Shared that this was work done by the entire enterprise to identify unallocated resources that could be leveraged to fund this shared priority.
 - When LCEY first began, goal was to create table where Executive Branch and sister agencies can come together on behalf of children and families and to break down silos to accomplish shared goals, including that what's best for our kids is what's best for our state.
 - Secretary Amundson shared her gratitude for participating in the important work that child care is and how it is important for children and families, our workforce, and Wisconsin's economy.
 - Flagged that these emergency funds are a temporary solution to keep child care afloat and will bridge until the next budget.
- Important to recognize what the funds are, and what they are not.

- Governor Evers' original ask was for \$340 million and while we are grateful for the money that was granted, these funds are still temporary.
- One-time investment of funds and as we move toward next biennial budget, we will face same risks of program closures, tuition increases, and lack of access to affordable care.
- Slate of deregulation bills working through the legislature that aren't really choices as these folks are just above the water line.
 - Bills have been divisive in the field and efforts to deregulate child care could cause long-term harm.
- Opportunity to keep the issue of funding child care at front and center.
 - Governor has been out in front visiting many child care centers and speaking about child care in other speaking situations.
 - Secretary Amundson asked members to find spaces and places to share talking points about the importance of child care investment.

Agenda Preview

- Bulk of meeting will be around child care, with DCF's Division of Early Childhood and Education Administrator, Priya Bhatia, to share emerging data about Child Care Counts and answer questions.
- DCF has a new data set to share with the group for feedback.
- Rural perspective from the Mauston Dream Up! cohort who will share their experience tackling the child care crisis.

Member Discussion

- Secretary Amundson invited other agencies to share any bright spots, issues, advances in the budget, or news around kids and families.
- **CANPB:** Rebecca Murray shared that CANPB received an extra \$1 million in budget. Asked for more, but happy to receive the increase, since CANPB has not had a budget increase in about twelve years. Part went to family resources centers and finished an accreditation process for family resource centers to help ensure families receive the resources that they need. Other part of the money received used for expanding Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and just finished procurement. Using funds to expand Triple P to new places. Received 9 applications and 6 of those were from new agencies.
- **DOA:** Secretary Blumenfeld shared that DOA continues to help most vulnerable families. Focused on making sure that families in need have energy assistance for heating, electric, and utilities. Also working with rental assistance and help for homeowners for most vulnerable participants. Connecting federal funds to keep supporting families and communities.
- **DOC:** No new updates.
- **DFI:** Secretary Haberland shared that this month, DFI has a promotion with Edvest so that when individuals open a new account, TIAA-CREF puts in \$50 to jump start the program.
- **DHS:** No new updates.
- **DNR:** Julie Majerus shared that more than \$402 million was allocated for financial assistance through the safe drinking water loan program to 106 municipalities to improve drinking water quality. Much of this was enhanced funding through bipartisan infrastructure law. This will fund projects like lead line replacement which is important for child mental and physical health and for addressing contaminants like PFOS. Also in a year-long development process for putting together five year statewide comprehensive outdoor

recreation plan. Part of this development process is putting together an advisory committee which DCF and DHS will be a part of, along with other partners. Will look at motivations, challenges, and access for families to outdoor recreation.

- **DPI:** State Superintendent Underly shared that DPI is getting close to embarking on statewide visits for strategic plan listening sessions. Also hearing a lot from educators and administrators that child care is a major issue for them to be able to stay in the workforce.
- **DOR:** Secretary Barca shared that there is a bill to change the name of the Earned Income Tax Credit to the Earned Income Child Care Credit; however, there already is a Child Care Credit, so DOR is worried that the proposed change may cause confusion. League of Women Voters and Wisconsin Institute of CPAs have come out against the legislation. DOR will send out letters to everyone who could potentially qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit but who have not claimed it. In the past, sending these letters seems to have increased number of people who claim it. Secretary Barca also indicated that with increase in shared revenue through an innovation fund, there is a possibility that communities could combine funds to increase access to things like child care. Will check in on the definition to see if this is a possibility.
- **DOT:** Kathy Bilek shared that they don't have many updates aside from general things like safe routes to schools.
- **DVA:** Joey Hoey shared DVA is finishing up one round of grants for mental health and will be announcing three more grants later this year for mental health.
- **OCMH:** Linda Hall shared that OCMH did not receive money for school mental health, but they are pleased to work with DCF around mental health consultation for early years. OCMH's role is to bring in parents and providers with lived experience.
- **WEDC:** Tracy Lubber shared that WEDC had their economic summit this week and one specific session on child care and why quality counts. There was a presentation on brain development, policy, and funding. One of the presenters shared that every dollar spent on early childhood would return in four to nine dollars. Another point was that young children are our future workforce and increasing quality of early childhood care is beneficial to the future workforce. Over 400 people attended this event. Referenced a cheese company owner who is building a child care center with his funds for his workers and others in the community.
- **WHEDA:** Elmer Moore shared that everything that they do at WHEDA has extraordinary consequences for young people. One workforce issue is housing and reasonable, affordable childcare. Elmer shared that he has been mentioning housing and childcare during his speeches. Additionally, a Workforce Bill package included a \$50 million fund for homeowners to allow them to make necessary renovations and updates. Governor's veto allowed these funds to be a forgivable loan so that folks who can least afford a loan have access to updating their homes. Also shared about discussions with child care workers at his children's daycare who mentioned the difficulty to have affordable housing.

Child Care Data Discussion

- Priya Bhatia shared that there has been a hunger for more data around child care.
- DCF recently had a step-down in Child Care Counts payments by about 50%, which was partially due to ARPA dollars ending.
- Want to continue to share data to tell story about what is happening in child care field.
- One thing DCF has been working on is a dashboard, and it is still in development mode.
- Dashboard will be external facing and available to anyone who wants information on the landscape of child care.

- Dashboard demo:
 - Data in lower right-hand corner is statewide data with number and types of providers.
 - Also lists the regulated capacity, which is the number of children that the programs can care for under regulations, as opposed to the number of children actually being cared for.
 - Dashboard shows how many new and closed providers there are. Currently at about net neutral for month of September.
 - Upper right-hand corner allows dissection of data and can narrow down by county/tribal nation, senate/assembly districts, or licensing region.
 - In each of these breakdowns, can see data within that region.
 - There is also a function to review trends of child care over time, up to 10 years back in time.
 - One trend we are seeing is a decline in family providers in our rural areas.
 - Critical because family providers tend to be more flexible in hours, less expensive, and more tailored care.
- Dashboard demo discussion:
 - Suggestion to overlay declines in child care providers with declines in population.
 - One thing DCF hears a lot about is that max capacity does not reflect that many facilities have closed classrooms because they cannot find sufficient staff for their businesses.
 - This as been a gap in our data collection and currently don't have a way of knowing how many licensed spots are available.
 - Planning to do a survey in 2024 Child Care Counts application so that providers can share this type of data, including whether staffing challenges affects families' ability to find care.
 - Also hear that providers may be closed or have shortened hours due to staffing issues.
 - Elmer Moore asked what considerations have been made to make this dashboard happen? For example, is there a way to make this usable for someone thinking about opening a child care facility or to pinpoint an opportunity area?
 - Secretary Amundson shared that there is other data that could broaden the scope to other things like K-12, transportation, health and wellness, etc.
 - Asked for feedback from council members if there are requests to overlay additional data with the child care dashboard.
 - Secretary Amundson also shared that it would be powerful to share the information publicly and this could allow individuals to make better business decisions when considering potential locations.

Break

Dream Up! Mauston: Rural Spotlight on Child Care Challenges and Opportunities

- DCF has run three rounds of Dream Up! program to allow communities to build capacity and supply. When communities apply, DCF partners with First Children's Finance to be able to understand local context and look for solutions for local community.
- Secretary Amundson met with folks in Mauston in Juneau County to discuss what issues they were facing along with some of the solutions.

- Panel members include Lynda Olenik, Director of Teaching and Learning in the Mauston School District, Tamaya Loewe, Executive Director at Juneau County Economic Development, Shar Weibel, Director at St. Paul's Lil' Lambs Child Care Center in Mauston, Dawn Buchholz, Director of Juneau County Department of Human Services, and Ami Board, Juneau County Child Support Manager and member of the Juneau County Ad Hoc Committee.
- Tamaya Loewe shared a little background about Mauston, and that Juneau County is a child care desert.
 - There are 17 regulated providers in the county with 627 child care slots, but this is close to double the standard definition of a child care desert, and that there are 6-7 children per child care slot.
 - Mauston School District Region applied for and was awarded the Dream Up! grant for cohort three.
 - Mauston School district serves three zip codes. Top industries in Mauston are government services, health care, and production and manufacturing.
 - Due to the child care shortage, workplaces in Mauston have shifted positions to part-time and adjusting production schedules.
 - There are 633 children in the 0-5 age range with working parents and only 156 child care slots.
- Dawn Buchholz shared that there are only two certified family child care providers in Juneau County.
 - Juneau County has a significant issue with drugs and is one of the poorest counties in the state. The 2020 per capita income was second lowest in the state.
 - Dawn noted the correlation between working, housing, and child care, and that it is difficult to address any one of these things in a box.
 - Juneau County has a lack of affordable housing and very low-quality housing options.
 - Noted link between child poverty and child welfare.
 - Transportation is also an issue, as Juneau is a rural county. Can be difficult for people to get to work, treatment, school, etc.
 - Recently health department did an assessment and top three challenges were good jobs/strong economy, affordable/good housing, and transportation.
- Lynda Olenik shared that the community is very supportive of education.
 - There was a referendum in 2020 that passed to allow Mauston to build a new elementary school.
 - Also worked with high school principal and determined that they wanted to expand technical education aspects of high school.
 - Noted that limited child care availability has also made it difficult for businesses to hire employees.

- During the pandemic, families struggled with what to do with their school-aged children when they had to go to work.
 - Had child care for school-aged children available in the schools.
- Shar Weibel shared that her child care center has been open for 5.5 years and have been mostly full since day one, along with a long waiting list.
 - Biggest challenge has been finding qualified employees. Has been hiring folks who are interested in working in child care and helping to facilitate their training.
- Dawn shared how essential child care is to allow for parents to get to work and treatment, and for the child, so that they have a safe and consistent environment.
- Tamaya shared that her department now works much more closely with the county human services department, which has been a great benefit.
 - Economic development focuses on trends, and the child care issues during pandemic provided the “perfect storm” for an opportunity to apply for the Partner Up! and Dream Up! grants.
 - Two school districts in Juneau County have received grants from DCF.
 - Have started Community Action Teams with primary focus being Good Jobs, Strong Economy.
 - It became clear very quickly after the establishment of the action teams that two of the biggest needs for the workforce were child care and housing.
 - Invited in as many folks as possible from every industry cross section including school districts, child care providers, families, health department, human services, medical professionals, prisons, etc. to understand their specific needs.
 - Starting to see some success in the short term, including increasing child care slots, adding new providers, and fortifying existing providers.
 - Continue to have a robust team working on these issues.
 - Shared that just under \$400,000 has been allocated to child care and are working on trying to get additional funds.
 - State has provided about \$200,000 to increase slots and fortify existing providers.
- Secretary Amundson shared that this story is inspiring due to the community’s willingness to work together to solve these issues.
 - Gave credit to Juneau County for planning and ARPA funding decisions being made.
- Ami Board shared that while being a part of the Ad Hoc Committees, she has heard from many folks who indicated that child care is a major issue.
 - Also have frustrations around recruitment and retention of staff, largely cause by not having child care in the area.
 - Sent out a survey to Juneau County asking about the need for child care.

- This triggered a conversation with the schools to discuss options for solving the issue.
- Ami also shared that there has been a noticeable decline in child care options in the county over time.
- Secretary Amundson asked what the critical linchpins for success have been at this point.
 - Lynda shared that sitting down at the table with others who are interested in the same topic and are coming from different points of view.
 - Getting out of the silos to connect government, child care, business owners and managers.
 - Working with Western Technical College to the High School to build child care workforce.
 - Dawn shared that the public health department's development of teams around specific issues and inviting right players to the table, including Juneau County Development Corps. and the school districts, was also very helpful.
- Secretary Amundson asked Shar how important it is to have child care providers at the table and why?
 - Shar stated that there are a lot of misconceptions around child care. She is hopeful that she provided education for those who have not worked in the industry. Industry has a lot of challenges that folks don't necessarily think about.
 - Having voices there is critical to provide education and need for quality.
- Secretary Amundson shared that she and State Superintendent Underly have both heard about challenges between growing robust early child care and while there are schools provided 4K.
 - Some have stated that this can make it more difficult to keep child care business afloat.
 - Conversely, in Juneau County, there is a collaborative spirit and recognition that when there is such a child care desert, need all hands on deck.
 - Secretary Amundson asked Lynda what the school learned about entering the child care realm?
 - Lynda shared that is it not an easy task to open a child care center. There has been a learning curve and being able to speak to those in the industry has been helpful.
 - Lynda was able to get help with pre-licensing.
 - Went into it thinking that it wouldn't be difficult to do, but they found that cost for renovations were greater than expected to meet codes for infants in toddlers.
 - Community action team was able to help bring funding in to accomplish renovation.
 - Lynda stated that the more than can be done to help startups, the better.

- Also stated how difficult it is for child care centers to make ends meet. Competing for staff and the challenge to give quality care and hire quality people is something we're all facing.
- Tamaya shared that the infusion of cash support has been valuable due to regulations needed.
 - Understand that grants are not a sustainable fix but was enough to get started.
 - Cost of providing care is much greater than what families can afford.
 - Long term solutions include partnership of child care facilities and school districts, churches, or nursing homes.
 - Tamaya shared a story of a child care owner in Elroy that was going to have to close her doors after providing care for decades. Her child care facility needed a remodel, she didn't have funding needed to make those repairs.
 - Son and daughter-in-law encouraged her to stay in business and rallied 27 families to do a fundraiser to give to child care center to make necessary repairs so she could keep her business open.
 - Also used ARPA funding in 2020 and 2021 that allowed her to pay off repairs.
 - Looking at a nonprofit model moving forward with this business.

Adjourn

- Secretary Amundson thanks council members and panel members for their participation. Meeting was adjourned.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access this information in an alternate format, need it translated to another language, or need other accommodations, please contact Rachelle Hopp; phone 608-422-7078 or the Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711. For civil rights questions, call (608) 422-6889.

*Housing for the ECE workforce – DWD and WED
 WHEDA – affordable housing
 DHS supportive housing
 Have a tribe present
 Tribal language revitimau*