

Working Group on Early Childhood Governance
May 4, 2023 2PM
Room 402, Vlrks Building
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
3 West Road, Cranston, 02920

Minutes Approved 7-27-23

Members in Attendance

- EOHHS/Children’s Cabinet Chair: Secretary Novais
- RIDOH: Kristine Campagna
- RIDE: Lisa Odom-Villella
- RI KIDS COUNT: Leanne Barrett

Welcome & Overview

- Attendees introduced themselves and their organizations around the table
- Kayla overviewed the agenda

Vote on Adoption of Minutes

- The Working Group on Early Childhood Governance voted on adopting the minutes from the February 9, 2023 meeting
 - First: Kristine Campagna
 - Second: Lisa Odom-Villella
 - All voted in favor and the minutes were accepted.

Introduction of the Governance Systems Analysis Team

- Kayla reviewed the work of the Working Group to date, including the adoption of a mission and vision; stakeholder engagement; and the procurement of a consulting team, Foresight Law + Policy (FLP) / Watershed Advisors, through a Request for Proposals process
- Leanne noted that the Senate had passed a bill this session for an Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning, which would be a good thing for the consulting team to review
- FLP/Watershed team introduced themselves and their experience working on early childhood governance projects nationally. The team includes:
 - Elliot Regenstein, Foresight Law + Policy
 - Nasha Patel, Watershed Advisors
 - Lizzie Cosse, Watershed Advisors
 - Afton Partners will support the fiscal analysis
- Their goal is not to come with answers, but to come with questions that can support RI with developing a report
- At the heart of this conversation are the questions:
 - What are the most important things you’re trying to accomplish?
 - And given what you’re trying to accomplish, what’s the best way to do that?
- Approach:
 - We see successful local early childhood ecosystems as the key to family success, and see the state’s role as supporting those ecosystems
 - We believe that fragmentation comes at a cost, and puts a burden on communities and providers

- We will be looking at defining the state’s role, identifying the capacities needed to do it well, and framing key tradeoffs regarding the best configuration of that capacity
- We see effective data use as critical to the state’s ongoing success in whatever role is defined for it
- Workplan key components include:
 - Begin with significant stakeholder engagement and document review, as well as fiscal analysis
 - Bring initial findings from landscape analysis to Working Group for discussion
 - Share findings on national best practices
 - Begin projecting costs of different options for governance change
 - Present initial synthesis of elements to include in the final report, including the fiscal analysis
 - Additional outreach to stakeholders to collect feedback
 - Synthesize feedback and produce final draft
- As tentative conclusions start to emerge we will test them with the Working Group. Our approach is to iterate and learn from the Working Group as we go, rather than save everything for a “big reveal” at the end.

Discussion

- Acting Secretary Novais noted that she appreciated the phased approach with multiple rounds of feedback and iteration to avoid a “big reveal” at the end. It is important that we go into the work without a pre-conceived idea of what the outcome will be.
- Lisa Odom-Villella asked about a list of who the consulting team will be interviewing. Kayla noted that an initial list was discussed at the last meeting, and that will be the foundation of the outreach, as well as the Early Learning Council as the advisory committee. The staff core team will support the logistics and invites. We will also go to meetings that already exist as well as hold meetings specific to roles (such as family visiting, early learning, etc). The FLP/Watershed team said they will be dependent on the group to share names but they are happy to talk to anyone and imagine more people will engage as we go. The report will anonymize individual comments but will list everyone they talked with at the end of report.
- Leanne Barrett asked about framing the work around the persistent problems and challenges, which are often the issues that families and providers face. Elliot noted that what is common in these projects is that everyone is coming at this from different angles, and that’s why it is important to talk to everyone in this process who have different stakes and roles in the system. Their job is to synthesize all of those and identify the problems that have critical mass and then to what extent that can be addressed by governance.
- Leanne Barrett noted that the Senate bill included more community members involved in the governance body, but in the legislation that created this Working Group, it is just RI Kids Count named, so she is feeling significant responsibility to bring community voice to the conversation. She is concerned about how we are going to finalize this report with recommendations.
 - Kayla noted that one of the strengths of the FLP/Watershed proposal was the workplan that included multiple rounds and no big reveal – but going through many rounds of conversation. Also, there will not just be one recommendation, but rather will discuss trade-offs of different options. This will set us up as state to have a very informed conversation about governance.

- Acting Secretary Novais noted that that's why from the get-go, we must hear from families directly so that we are grounding this work in the needs of families. We want a system that creates choice, equity, and voice.
- Elliot noted all of these voices are needed to understand the full picture. Nasha noted that – in the development of the report and the recommendations – the tradeoffs of different options will reflect the advantages and disadvantages of these recommendations, based on the input of different stakeholders.

Next Steps

- Kayla noted that the consulting team would move forward with the stakeholder conversations over the next two months
- The Working Group will reconvene July 27 at 11am to discuss interim findings of the landscape analysis. The other scheduled meeting is September 28 at 11am. An August meeting may be added, if needed.

Public Comment

- A member of the public who has been at Head Start for 27 years said that she is thrilled to see another workgroup that is taking this on, and thrilled that this has momentum and has hope that there is shared vision to move forward
- Leanne noted that this idea around an office of early childhood came forward in the legislature when Build Back Better was still being considered, so we are different place now than before. We have made baby steps, such as moving licensing from DCYF to DHS.

Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn
 - First: Acting Secretary Novais
 - Second: Lisa Odom-Villela
 - All voted in favor
- The meeting adjourned at 2:58PM.