

**Illinois Early Learning Council
Quality and Workforce Committee
July 19, 2022, 9:00 AM-10:30 AM**

Minutes

Present:

Co-chairs Bela Motè and Christi Chadwick

GOECD Staffers: Zach Allen, Tom Layman

MEMBERS: Barbara Bowman, Bryan Stokes II, Brynn Seibert, Cathy Mannen, Cerathal Burgess-Burnett, Courtney Hatcher, Cristina Pacione-Zayas, Dan Harris, Dan Kotowski, Denise Monnier, Gene Howell, Josie Yanguas, Marcy Mendenhall, Ruth Kimble, Sara Slaughter, Shauna Ejeh, Stephanie Bernoteit, Teri Talan

OTHERS PRESENT: Alesha Calhoun, Angela Farwig (Advance Illinois), Bria Carter (It Takes a Village & Child Care Advocates United), Jamilah Jordan (GOECD), Mercedes Mondragon (Start Early), Tanya Dawson (GOECD)

9:00 AM Welcome and Introduction

The Committee co-chairs, Bela Motè and Christi Chadwick welcomed attendees. Christi stated that committee members have been appointed by the Governor, and if there is a vote at any point, it is those appointees who will vote. However, the committee welcomes non-member participation. Discussions are open to all. Christi also said the meetings will be recorded, and at that point the recording of this meeting began.

Bela asked participants to introduce themselves by stating their name, role, and affiliation. After introductions, Bela facilitated an icebreaker. She asked participants to answer the question: What is the most important thing about quality and workforce? Almost every answer addressed workforce issues, particularly the current workforce crisis. Examples include:

- Compensation
- Short-term crisis response and longer-term systemic causes
- Mechanisms to increase compensation
- Workforce: Dignity, respect, wages
- Continued learning over time connected to credentials and compensation
- Support for home-based providers, including compensation and training/consultation
- Emphasis on infant/toddler workforce
- Workforce social and emotional wellbeing
- Quality mentoring for new teachers

9:30 AM Level Setting

Landscape of Quality and Workforce

Setting the stage for discussing the draft committee charge and possible areas of focus, Tom Layman provided a quick overview of the 5-piece puzzle graphic pasted at the end of these minutes. The puzzle shows the interlocking parts of the early childhood education and care system. Tom pointed to the Program Standards piece and said he hoped one item from the former Quality Committee's ExceleRate Subcommittee would come to this committee later in the year – namely, the recommendation for a revised ExceleRate Illinois framework to cover center-based and school-based programs. That

framework is designed to align with an improved funding and compensation mechanism (the “Funding” piece of the puzzle) and with targeted Infrastructure Supports including training, technical assistance, consultation, and coaching. Tom then pointed to the Workforce puzzle piece. He said that given the workforce crisis and committee members’ initial comments, it appeared that the Workforce piece might become this committee’s primary focus. (We agreed to drop the word “credentials” on the puzzle and just call it “workforce”).

Draft Committee Charge

Bela introduced discussion of the draft committee charge. The draft, which had been circulated on the agenda, was:

- Identify, support, connect and advise on statewide efforts to recruit and retain highly qualified, diverse early childhood educators, and improve professional preparation, training, and ongoing professional development.

Discussion focused on the urgency of the workforce crisis. One comment was that given the difficulty in finding qualified staff, any other quality concerns become an afterthought. The importance of higher wages was noted, as well as the need for more bilingual staff members. One participant noted that quality should be embedded in wages – that wages should increase with qualifications. Teri Talan said that Power to the Profession and the Unifying Framework will be moving forward in proposed legislation and administrative rule in some states, and the Illinois should be intentional in alignment with this work. Marcy Mendenhall suggested we add “highly compensated” to the charge. She also suggested weaving the Funding Commission work into this committee’s work. Sara Slaughter proposed new wording for the committee charge, as follows: “Address the urgent needs to recruit and retain a qualified, diverse workforce while identifying steps to mitigate the systemic workforce problems including accessible pathways and equitable compensation. Identify and support efforts to improve program quality with a racial equity lens.”

Shauna Ejuh suggested adding “develop”, recruit and retain.... She said we know we are going to have to develop meaningful pathways to maintain the diversity of the workforce. Thus, the charge would be:

- Address the urgent needs to develop, recruit and retain a qualified, diverse workforce while identifying steps to mitigate the systemic workforce problems including accessible pathways and equitable compensation. Identify and support efforts to improve program quality with a racial equity lens.

Bela concluded by saying the co-chairs and staff would review the recommendations and bring revised wording back to the committee.

Framing the Work Over the Next Year

Christi Chadwick introduced the next discussion. She provided a link for the Mural whiteboard and asked participants to put thoughts in two sections corresponding to the following two topics. Participant reflections are listed under each item. (Note: In preparing these minutes, the whiteboard entries below have been sorted into tentative themes.)

Reflections on the most pressing focus for the committee regarding development of an adequate, well-qualified, and stable workforce.

- Pay parity for all roles with school compensation
- Salary plus benefits, including opportunities for retirement benefits and health and mental health
- Continued financial support to help with compensation

- Salary parity that is aligned to the district that includes increases based on years of service or at a minimum built into the structure for COLA
- Monetary rewards for moving up the credentialing scale should be universal
- Living wage compensation for all roles (+1)
- Wages and benefits (+1)
- Living wage with benefits should be the base for all in the field (+1)
- Paid holiday
- Wage parity and benefits
- Correlations between job competency and pay. (Certifications may be a placeholder until performance is assessed.)
- Fully fund early learning as we do K-12
- Need for a linguistically competent EC workforce at all program levels
- Workforce recruitment strategies with emphasis on equity
- Continuous opportunities for professional development and coaching
- Recruitment, retention, and reinvestment in staff
- Job-embedded professional development should be recognized and receive credit hours in all sectors
- Appropriately recognize high-quality Montessori credentials to allow thousands of well-prepared teachers to be employed and paid at the level they deserve. At least 10 states recognize Montessori credentials as a pathway to licensure.
- Mentorship and apprenticeship programs (+1)
- Balancing staff needs and quality classrooms (e.g., consistent staff ratios, etc.)
- Turnover leads to turnover, as this impacts working conditions
- How is workforce different now than 3 years ago? What are the needs? How are they different? Impact of Covid?
- Coaching and mentoring opportunities for teachers and providers across the ECEC field
- Pathways to ECE PEL that are accessible to incumbent workforce
- Recognizing professionalism in the field
- Recognize the history and status of caregiving activities (women, people of color, low income) and how to change this perception
- Individuals in care settings are devalued, being viewed as small, weak, or old. We may change the perception to: Education includes care. EC teachers educate and care, K12 teachers educate and care (which became apparent during Covid).
- Challenge the perceived divide between care and education. Care work needs to be recognized and fairly compensated.
- Why do we finance education but depend on parents to fund care?

Reflections on the most pressing focus for the committee regarding other aspects of program quality.

- Move the ExceleRate subcommittee proposal forward
- Need common standards for quality across settings, or how do we get to common strategy
- Need to define and land on what this committee acknowledges “is quality” (+1)
- Move to more uniform, common entry-to-employment requirements for roles (coupled with compensation)
- Commitment to work with and provide pathways for providers who have already shown a commitment to the work
- Thinking about how workforce supports must be coupled with quality environments for children (and staff). Children must have access to enough high-quality staff, equipment, materials, etc.

Staff need supportive working environments and materials and other staff to create that environment

- Enabling individuals to enter as professionals, ready to contribute as such whatever funding environment we are in. Mission must remain center stage.
- Develop opportunities for teacher leadership
- Home-based providers need support to be successful and prepare children for school
- Acknowledging the barriers
- Surviving mode instead of thriving mentality
- Quality is an afterthought
- Continued efforts to link 0-5 programs and professionals with school programs and professionals (+1)
- Paid professional development day
- Examine restrictive barriers for all quality programs to qualify for funding
- Fully funded early learning system needed to ensure continuous quality
- Understanding programs cannot focus on quality because they are just surviving
- Directly addressing the role of profit in our system and determine how it is compatible with quality
- Expand ExceleRate Pilot with its innovative funding design

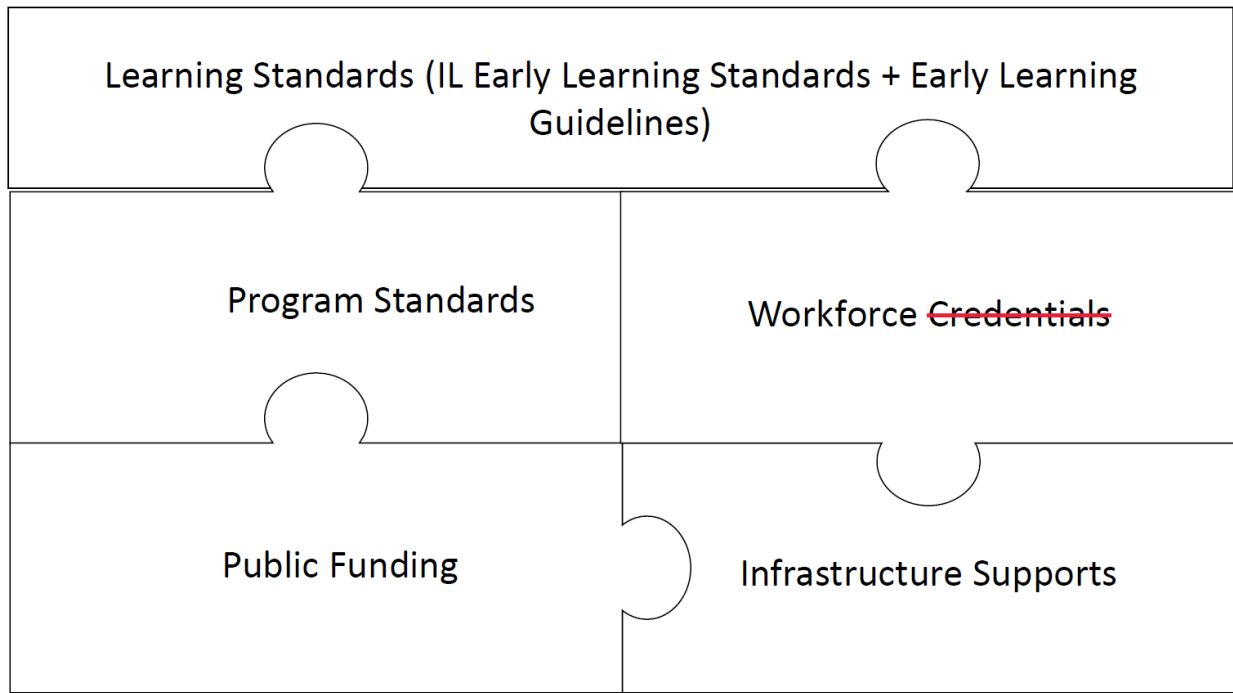
Meeting dates and frequency

The co-chairs suggested we meet every other month until the end of the year. Meetings would be scheduled for September and November. Participants agreed with the suggestion and the co-chairs asked Tom to circulate a poll to determine dates and times.

Some discussion followed on what outcomes or work products this committee might target. One participant asked what happens to committee recommendations. Dr. Jor'dan, GOECD Executive Director, replied that they are submitted to the Early Learning Council Executive Committee for approval. The Executive Committee is the decision-making body for the Council. Some discussion followed about the Quality and Workforce Committee's ability to drive change. Participants suggested that committee discussions and recommendations can influence decision makers and can provide background for legislators when bills are being considered. Barbara Bowman suggested that as a next step, the committee might review a summary of context issues and select possible actions the group might take.

10:20 AM: Public Comment and Adjourn

Christi Chadwick asked if anyone wished to make public comment. There were no comments, and the meeting was adjourned.



We envision Illinois as a place where every young child – regardless of race, ethnicity, income, language, geography, ability, immigration status, or other circumstance – receives the strongest possible start to life so that they grow up safe, healthy, happy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn.

Racial Equity Definition: A racially equitable society values and embraces all racial/ethnic identities. In such a society, one’s racial/ethnic identity (particularly Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian) is not a factor in an individual’s ability to prosper. An early learning system that is racially equitable is driven by data and ensures that:

- Every young child and family regardless of race, ethnicity, and social circumstance has everything s/he/they need to develop optimally.
- Resources, opportunities, rewards, and burdens are fairly distributed across groups and communities so that those with the greatest challenges are adequately supported and not further disadvantaged; and
- Systems and policies are designed, reframed, or eliminated to promote greater justice for children and families.

Racial Equity Priorities:

- 1) Align and standardize race/ethnicity data collection and reporting.
- 2) Evaluate and identify whether processes for distributing resources exacerbate racial disparities, including agency contracting.
- 3) Address race/ethnicity disparities in terms of workforce compensation and advancement.
- 4) Eliminate racial/ethnic disparities for children participating in all programs that contribute to school readiness and life success by addressing racial disparities in enrollment in preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds and in prenatal to age 3 services.