



POLK COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA BOARD MEETING

Zoom Meeting Only

March 24, 2021

Meeting conducted electronically pursuant to Iowa Code section 21.8. The current circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor's proclamation directing that no more than 10 individuals may meet in a public gathering, and CDC guidelines regarding social distancing dictate that conducting this meeting in person is impossible or impracticable.

Voting Members Present: Emily Westergaard, Ahmed Agyeman, Dave Arens, Bryan Huggins, Matt Knoll, Matthew Klemme, Charles Mercer, Eric Tubbs, Jana Shepherd, Mee Yang Lee; Deanna Bennigsdorf and Adam Montufar joined at 8:03 a.m.; Jeanie McCarville Kerber and Tabitha Choquette joined at 8:07 a.m.; Eva Morales joined at 8:25 a.m.; Rob Barron and Jem Gong-Browne joined at 8:57 a.m.

Voting Members Absent: Sandy Carter, Nick Dial, Marianka Pille

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Ex-Officio Members Absent: Terry Harrmann, Aaron Johnson, Barb Merrill, Brook Rosenberg

Staff Present: Barb Bremner, Jody Kanne

Guests Present: Amy Curtis, ECQuIP Early Childhood Center Consultant; Heidi LaBounty, ECQuIP Project Manager, Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children; Lanette Nelson, Healthy Start Manager, EveryStep

Welcome

Board Chair Emily Westergaard called the Polk County Early Childhood Iowa Board meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Quorum was met at this time.

Approval February Minutes

Minutes of the February 24, 2021 meeting were presented. There were no comments or corrections.

A motion to approve the February 2021 minutes was made by Dave Arens and seconded by Mee Yang Lee. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Deanna Bennigsdorf and Adam Montufar joined at 8:03 a.m.

Financial Statements February 2021

Barb Bremner presented the financial statements for February 2021. These statements are a cash presentation of financial transactions which took place through February of fiscal year 2021.

School Ready

- FY21 Polk County ECI School Ready funding is \$2,787,342
- Carry Forward funds total \$296,753.93

- Total School Ready funds in FY21 budget are \$3,084,095.93
- Interest accrued through February 2021 totals \$7,881.09
- Expended School Ready funds end of February 2021 total \$1,247,788.18
- Expenditures are 40% of FY21 School Ready budget. At end of February 2020 48% of FY20 budget had been expended

Jeanie McCarville Kerber and Tabitha Choquette joined at 8:07 a.m.

Early Childhood

- FY21 Polk County ECI Early Childhood funding is \$928,174
- Carry Forward funds total \$123,624.28
- Total Early Childhood funds in FY21 budget are \$1,051,798.28
- Interest accrued through January 2021 totals \$3,287.10
- Expended Early Childhood funds end of February 2021 total \$370,473.15
- Expenditures are 35% of FY21 Early Childhood budget. At end of February 2020 54% of FY20 budget had been expended

A motion to approve the February 2021 financials was made by Jeanie McCarville Kerber and seconded by Charles Mercer. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Operational Grants to Coalition Centers

Bremner reviewed the Center Essential Service Operational Grants COVID-19 document detailing quarterly Pilot Stay Bonus spending for the first two quarters of FY21. Each center's contract was based on full center staffing with no unexcused absences throughout the year. Based on the first half expenditures, and assuming a maximum payout for the third and fourth quarters, Bremner estimates \$67,433.74 in remaining funds at the end of this fiscal year. With the additional \$30,000 that Child Care Resource and Referral has projected as unused funds for their consultant contract, the board has \$107,550 available to provide grants to centers to be used for operational costs or special projects. Grant amount has been calculated using DHS licensed capacity, \$150 per enrollment slot. Bremner discussed issuing these grants with Shanell Wagler, Early Childhood Iowa, who felt this was a good, and compliant, use of these funds.

Members supported providing funds to centers. Members discussed reviewing individual center needs: is one center in need of more assistance than another? Does the board need to set parameters on the use of funds? Are there specific things members would not like funds to be used for that should be relayed to the centers? Westergaard shared after the Q3 Stay Bonus payments are disbursed, there may be additional funds available the cabinet could allocate to centers with a higher need. There are also \$86,989.35 remaining in Early Childhood non-contracted funds that could be used to support emergency requests from centers.

Eva Morales joined at 8:25 a.m.

The meeting moved to the Coalition Child Care Center Updates discussion before the members voted on the Operational Grants disbursement.

Coalition Child Care Center Updates

Heidi LaBounty, ECQuIP Project Manager, and Amy Curtis, ECQuIP Early Childhood Center Consultant, with Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children updated members on the coalition centers. LaBounty walked members through the Coalition Centers Spreadsheet FY21. LaBounty shared most centers are still operating below enrollment capacity. CARES funding has been extremely helpful to centers throughout the pandemic especially DHS continuing the child care assistance payments with no restrictions on child absences. The team is working with centers not on the QRS scale to get these certified which will increase staff eligibility for WAGE\$ payments.

Member discussion:

- McCarville Kerber noted the additional costs, time and resources associated with a center becoming NAEYC accredited which can be a barrier for smaller centers.
 - Staff educational levels need to be high for the accreditation as well, which prohibits smaller centers from applying.
- Due to COVID-19 currently enrollments are not at capacity. Do we know how many centers do not have the staff to be at capacity right now?
 - LaBounty shared there is a shortage of staff to keep centers at capacity. A SWOT analysis was conducted in January/February with center directors. Directors identified a high number of staff related challenges e.g., staff burnout, mental wellness of staff, classroom ratio, and concerns if families will return. More classrooms are operating with one teacher per classroom which is not best practice for teachers or the kids.
 - Some centers deliberately lowered enrollments to keep classrooms in pods to follow CDC guidelines and allow for social distancing.
- LaBounty supports centers using proposed additional funds towards staff incentives. The gift cards were a highlight for center staff. Director's focus has been on supporting staff.

McCarville Kerber departed the meeting at 8:55 a.m.

Rob Barron and Jem Gong-Browne joined at 8:57 a.m.

Curtis discussed recent successes at Grand View center. Director Sarah Isaacson reported in December the center was able to provide raises for the first time since 2008 to staff. The center has a positive bank balance capable of sustaining the center for four months. While some of this success was due to the COVID-19 grants the center received, Curtis credits Isaacson's budgeting abilities. She is frugal with her spending, is open and honest with the team regarding the center's struggles, and open for suggestions and input. She has a strong connection with the families she serves.

Curtis reported centers were given a one year extension to reapply for their QRS rating due to COVID-19. The team is working with centers eligible to apply.

LaBounty reported Capitol Park's enrollment is up. The center is projecting enrollment to be at 70 by May 1. This is a good sign things may be beginning to open back up to "normal". The ECQuIP

team has been fully vaccinated and are able to get back into the centers to work with staff. Center staff are in the process of getting vaccinated. United Way set up a vaccination clinic for center staff; those individuals are receiving their second round of vaccinations this week.

Ahmed Agyeman departed the meeting at 9:01 a.m.

Discussion returned to the Operational Grants to Coalition Centers funding. Westergaard spoke in support of keeping funding guidelines flexible so the centers can use the funds as they see fit to meet their individual needs. Members discussed accountability on use of the funds back to the state. Bremner reported Wagler stated an open operational grant is acceptable and recommended documentation in minutes and in communication with centers. Members requested documentation from centers regarding intended uses of funding received.

A motion to approve the Operational Grants to Coalition Centers funding of \$107,550 was made by Dave Arens and seconded by Bryan Huggins. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Program Review

Members have access for Program Review documents in the FY21 Board Business folder in Google Drive and also have a meeting invitation for their scheduled review date the week of April 5th. Review meetings will be held via Zoom and will include program staff. Members are encouraged to come to meetings with questions for the program staff. Bremner will schedule a follow-up meeting for committees to discuss the reviews and proposed funding levels to present to the full board. Members are encouraged to reach out to Bremner or Westergaard with questions on program review process.

Governance Committee: Membership (Policy 2.4)

Westergaard reported the Governance Committee is responsible for recruiting and reviewing applications for new board members. Three members are needed for this committee. Anyone interested in sitting on the Governance Committee is asked to contact Bremner or Westergaard. Matt Knoll is the only member whose term will be ending June 30, 2021. Members were asked to contact Bremner if they will not be able to fulfill their cabinet term next year and also with any potential new board members.

Administrative Report

Bremner provided a brief Administrative Report:

- Bremner has been working to get the investment materials and meetings scheduled for cabinet members and program staff for the week of April 5th.
- Bremner continues to participate in the statewide every other week meetings with the state TA Team.
- DHS will continue to provide the stimulus grants to centers through June 30, 2021.

Old Business

None

New Business

Dave Arens has been selected as a member of the Governor's Childcare Task Force. Emily Schmitt with Sukup Manufacturing is chair of the task force. Sixteen additional members were nominated from other sectors statewide. The first meeting of the task force is April 5th and they have 100 days to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the child care shortage and barrier to work in Iowa. Four subcommittees have been established:

- Regulatory Barriers & Financing Options
- Expanding Eligibility for Child Care Assistance (CCA)
- Child Care Workforce Issues
- Increasing Employer Investment and Engagement Opportunities in Child Care

Arens is leading the Regulatory Barriers subcommittee and a member of the Increasing Employer Investment and Engagement Opportunities in Child Care subcommittee. Their first meeting is scheduled for April 5th.

Public Comment

None

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:22 a.m.