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Maximizing Federal Opportunities for Early Care and Education in Connecticut

Joint Informational Hearing of the Education & Human Services Committee

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Landscape of Early Care & Education

While there is demand for early care and education, the cost often limits access to care.

- CT currently has 202,071 children between the ages of 0-4, with approximately 62% living with parents in the workforce.[1]
- 12.31% of children under four years of age live in poverty.
- The cost of child care ranges from $6,000 to more than $12,000 annually for full-time child care of infants and toddlers, with that cost often exceeding 41% of the budget of a single parent earning the state median income.
- Head Start and Early Head Start serve approximately 8,000 children in CT.
- State-funded programs serve approximately 4,000 infant, toddler, and preschool children.[1]
- School Readiness Programs serve over 9,000 children in priority school districts.

- The child care subsidy program, Care4Kids, funded by the Child Care and Development Block Fund and state funds, served approximately 22,000 children prior to the program closure in May of 2009, with that number dropping to approximately 17,000 by October of that same year.

To be successful in our goal to have ALL children ready by five when they reach kindergarten doors, it is imperative that we fill the gaps that currently exist in terms of the educational and human service needs of Connecticut families. Sufficient funding must be committed to early care and education to ensure school readiness, have children thriving and families working. Presently, we are servicing a small portion of parents in the workforce.

Connecticut Early Care and Education SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, & Threats

As we look to creating a more coordinated approach to early care and education, an environmental scan would assist in identifying the strengths that we could build upon, the vulnerabilities the state must overcome, opportunities to forge ahead, and potential obstacles.

Strengths

- A significant amount of work has been done to identify the problems/gaps of the early care and education system. Cite who/which groups have developed this identification, strategies to address these gaps.
- Coordinating entities, including Discovery Collaboratives, School Readiness Councils, and the recently reformulated State Advisory Council, have been established to facilitate increased collaboration.
- CT has access to experts in this field. (e.g. Edward Zigler, Walter Gilliam, and Jack Shonkoff to name a few.)
- There is an escalating public will and recognition of the importance of early care and education.

Weakness

- There is a need to break down the silos that exist in early care and education that is often caused by varying funding streams and reporting requirements.
- Increased investments are needed to expand access to teacher education in order to meet the Connecticut State Department of Education's mandated credentials and to provide adequate compensation to early care and education teachers.

- Reimbursement rates to providers in the School Readiness Program were formulated, below cost of care, based upon the availability of reliable child care subsidy payments to supplement that reimbursement.
- Connecticut reimbursement rates to early care providers participating in the child care subsidy program are based on an outdated market rate survey conducted by in 2001. The reimbursement rate currently reflects the 60th percentile of the market rate, as opposed to the 75th percentile recommended by the federal Child Care and Development Fund guidelines.
- Eligibility for child care subsidy fluctuates and is consequently unreliable for families and providers.
- The enrollment process for state-funded services is cumbersome for both parents and providers.

Opportunities[2]

- Federal recognition and prioritization of education, including early care and education:
  1) Proposed $1.6 billion increase for Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG),
  2) A $989 million increase for Head Start Early Head Start—for a total of $8.2 billion,
  3) The Early Learning Challenge Fund proposal of $9 billion over ten years,
  4) A $10 billion increase over ten years for the child nutrition programs through the reauthorization of Child and Adult Care Food Program, and
  5) An increase in the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit for middle-class families, funding up to 35% of child care expenses depending on annual income.
- Child Care and Development Block Fund is up for reauthorization.
- The upcoming gubernatorial election will present an opportunity to provide CT with a children's champion.
- The reformulated State Advisory Council provides an opportunity for further collaboration and coordination of early care and education.

Threats

- The state budget deficit and attempts to balance the budget via cuts to programs affecting children and families serve to undermine increased access to quality early care and education. For example, the recently proposed $11.5 million cut to the child care subsidy program will decrease access to affordable child care and potentially prevent parents of young children from accessing gainful employment.

NEXT STEPS[3]

- It is imperative that Connecticut take a more inclusive and systematic approach to the implementation of early care and education.

- Implement legislation that mandates the development of uniform reporting requirements by the Department of Social Services and the Department of Education.

- CT must maximize current resources:

  1) Distribute the $1,131,375 in ARRA CCDBG Quality Expansion and $655,215 in Quality Infant Toddler funds to assist early care providers in the delivery of QUALITY early care and education,

  2) Incorporate the suggestions of early care providers for those funds as presented in the Child Care and Development Block Fund Plan hearings, as outlined in the state's plan for 10/1/09-9/30/11, and

  3) Solicit input from early care providers on how to best expend the budgeted funding for child care services. Policy making and planning must include a diverse cross section of those who perform the work daily to effectively identify efficiencies.

- Advocate with the Congressional delegation for the reauthorization of Child Care and Development Block Grant Fund, the recommended increases in CCDBG, Early and Head Start, and advocate for the passage of the bill containing the Early Learning Challenge Fund.

- CT must build upon our strengths to be positioned as a competitive candidate for federal funding.

- Build support for early care and education with gubernatorial candidates

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[1] *Data in "Current Landscape of Early Care and Education," gathered from National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, State profile-CT,* http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/statedata/statepro/display.cfm?state=Connecticut.

2 Connecticut Voices for Children. (2009). *Connecticut Early Care and Education Progress Report*, Cyd Oppenheimer.

[3]National Women's Law Center, (February 2010). *Administration's FY 2011 Budget: Early Childhood Highlights,* Washington, DC.

[4] Connecticut Department of Social Services . (200) *Plan for CCDF Services in Connecticut for Period 10/1/09-9/30/1.*