



Program Policy & Strategy Committee Meeting
January 31, 2012; 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m.
Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe
Conference Call

- Committee Attendees:** Dr. Yvonne Johnson; Roderick Beasley; Ann Karen Weller; Elizabeth Bezos; Ramiro Moreno
- Board Attendees:** The Hon. Cindy Lederman
- Staff Attendees:** Blythe Robinson; Jackye Russell; Mary Williams; Kristina Alonso; Fred Hicks; Dr. Christine Hughes; Pam Hollingsworth; Ana Rodriguez
- General Attendees:** Linda Carmona-Sanchez (AECE); Jackie Romillo (Citrus Health Network); Brian Sheafer (YMCA)

I. Welcome and Introductions

- Dr. Y. Johnson welcomed the committee and attendees.

II. Approval of November 29th Minutes

- Dr. Y. Johnson called for the approval of the November 29th Minutes.
 - Due to no quorum, motion was tabled.

III. Monroe Performance Report

- M. Williams shared the highlights of the Monroe Performance Report.

IV. Miami- Dade Performance Report

- J. Russell shared the highlights of the Miami-Dade Performance Report.
 - Dr. Y. Johnson asked why 28 parents declined services for children who showed concerns.
 - J. Russell stated that parents often decline services because they may not want their child labeled.
 - J. Romillo added that Citrus Health Network (CHN), who is contracted by Miami-Dade County to provide inclusion services, does collect letters from parents explaining why they are declining services. In some cases, parents do not follow through with services because they may not fully understand what is being recommended in terms of further evaluation and testing. In other cases, declines have been a result of children who are already receiving services. CHN uses a multi-pronged approach in reaching out to parents. CHN sends letters, calls parents, and asks teachers and directors to assist in engaging parents. Information is being sent to the home as well as the school to those parents who have not been responsive. Sometimes, CHN never receives a call back. It is a goal of CHN this year to find other ways to reach out to parents and engage them.



- E. Bezos stated that she has experienced firsthand that CHN goes above and beyond in trying to contact the parents. However, there are some conditions that do not allow parents to take advantage of the services. Some parents may have jobs that do not afford them the time off to take their children to appointments for services.
- Dr. Y Johnson asked if there are any services that were available at childcare sites.
- J. Romillo responded that less and less often are private service providers willing to come out to the centers to provide services. That is often related to reimbursement rates and the cost of having to send out staff to provide on-site services. It is available but it is very limited and not for every type of service needed.

V. Quality Standards Workgroup Update

- J. Russell stated that the purpose of the Quality Standards Workgroup was to look at prerequisites for providers who contract with the coalition to deliver School Readiness services. The workgroup is suspending its meetings until some decisions are made at the state level with regards to the current proposed legislation. There are several bills proposed that would impact how we currently operate the School Readiness program. The workgroup decided that it did not make sense to continue to meet and discuss prerequisites until we find out what rules are going to result from that pending legislation.

VI. VPK Low Performing Providers

- J. Russell stated that providers have gone through the verification process and completed their VPK Readiness Rate disputes with the Department of Education (DOE). The coalition has approved their submissions as of January 27th. It is expected that DOE will be publishing the final VPK Readiness Rate sometime in February. We also anticipate that Miami-Dade County will have a significant number of low performing providers because of the new level of 70% that providers will need to achieve.
- E. Bezos asked if the legislation has already passed to accept that as a minimum score. J. Russell responded that the state board will meet in March to tell us exactly what the final readiness rate will be.
- E. Bezos asked if exemptions are still not being granted for the English language learners and special needs children. J. Russell responded that they are still not granting exemptions for the testing of those children.
- E. Bezos asked if low performing providers would have to go through the Good Cause Exemption process if they had English language learners and special needs children included in the calculation of their score. J. Russell responded that if a provider is designated as low performing, they would be able to go through the Good Cause Exemption process.
- L. Carmona stated that the next meeting of the state Board of Education, where a final decision is going to be made about the readiness rate, is taking place on February 28th. Most childcare providers who will be determined low performing, technically have the option for a Good Cause Exemption, if they serve English Language learners or children with special needs. However, most childcare providers do not have an accepted form of determining who is an English language learner and most children in the childcare setting do not have an Individual Improvement Plan (IEP). In the public school setting, they conduct a home language survey, which is a form that has been adopted by the DOE to determine whether the child is coming from a home that predominantly speaks a



language other than English. That does not exist in childcare or in VPK. Therefore, early childcare providers would not technically qualify for a Good Cause Exemption based on language. A similar situation occurs for those children who may have special needs but do not have an IEP and might be in a childcare setting receiving VPK services. The provider would not qualify for a Good Cause Exemption either. This puts providers in a difficult position because it was already known that over 60% of all providers, both public and private would not meet the standards set, and would be determined to be a low performing provider. This is a very big issue because it makes the playing field very unfair for private providers as opposed to public providers.

- Dr. Y. Johnson asked if those children in private centers were supposed to have an IEP.
- L. Carmona responded that in many cases when the child goes into a childcare setting or VPK, it is often their first experience with group instruction and is often the first time that a child is identified as perhaps having some type of a learning challenge. So it takes a significant amount of time for that child to be formally evaluated and diagnosed and for an IEP to be developed. Often times, a child is identified, screened and referred for an evaluation at FDLRS Child Find and the child is often not evaluated until he/she has long left VPK and has entered kindergarten. And yet, that provider will still be designated a low performing provider.
- Dr. Y. Johnson stated that the bigger issue is that the child is not being identified nor receiving services.
- L. Carmona agreed but stated that there is no weighted funding for children with special needs in VPK in a private childcare setting. The only way that the child could receive services is if he/she goes into the public school system.
- E. Bezos stated that there isn't a mechanism to exempt children from being calculated in your score that may only need 3-6 months of services. We end up with providers being cut out of the VPK program and we will start seeing providers shun any children that might have special needs because it might hinder their readiness rate. While we would hope that providers would not do that, there is that possibility that it could happen. We will end up damaging the availability of this program for those children that really need it most.
- R. Moreno added that by the time a child is identified as having a special need, added to the time needed to obtain parental involvement, an entire year could have gone by.
- E. Bezos added that Miami-Dade County has the largest population of English language learners. However, the FLKRS is not given in any language other than English. English language learners represent up to 60% of the population.
- Dr. Y. Johnson asked what is within our power to do about this.
- L. Carmona responded that we need to speak with the state Board of Education and with legislators about the fact that we currently do not have a pre- and a post- test mechanism for VPK in order to measure learning gains. This paints a more accurate picture of the return on the investment of VPK dollars. We need to ask the Board of Education to decide, even though VPK is not part of the public school system, that VPK is part of an educational program. And as such, children that are attending VPK should have access to services that are funded by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Title I. This would eliminate a lot of the challenges providers have with serving children that have special needs and serving children who are English language learners.



VII. ELLIS Update

- F. Hicks explained that the ELLIS system will replace our current EFS system. EFS is the database where we currently track who is receiving which services, at what time, by which provider, and all payment information. The new system will be a web-enabled system being coded by Hewlett Packard, using Microsoft CRM which is a customer relations management software solution. The project is costing approximately \$12 million, funded by ARRA dollars. It is about one year away from implementation. Miami-Dade and Monroe counties have been bumped up on the list of possible test sites. We are asking for all of our subject matter experts to assist with the development. Currently we have had an opportunity to see some of the proposed screens and the interface.

VIII. Public Comment

- In response to E. Bezos' request for an action plan concerning VPK low performing providers, J. Russell stated that the Association of Early Learning Coalitions has already put together a response to the state Board of Education's plan. We should look at this response and see if anything needs to be added to it.
- Dr. Y. Johnson requested that an ad-hoc committee meeting take place to discuss VPK Low Performing Providers.
- E. Bezos volunteered to be on the committee and suggested that all of the provider organizations in Miami-Dade would benefit from being part of the discussion so that they can get parents involved as well.
- Dr. Y. Johnson stated that it is important to make sure that when we address this, that it is not only addressing the issues of the providers but also the impact it has on children and parents.

IX. Adjourn.

- Dr. Y. Johnson adjourned the meeting.