



# Minutes

Program Policy & Strategy Committee Meeting  
October 25, 2011; 3:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe  
Board Room  
2555 Ponce De Leon Blvd Suite 500  
Coral Gables, FL 33134

**Committee Attendees:** The Hon. Cindy Lederman; David Williams, Jr.; Shaleen Fagundo; Modesto Abety; Ann Karen Weller (via conference call)

**Staff Attendees:** Evelio Torres (CEO); Jackye Russell; Mary Williams (via conference call); Kristina Alonso; Milton Silvera; Leeana Pena; Blythe Robinson; Bethany Sands; Sandra Gonzalez; Dr. Christine Hughes; Tabatha Cullen; Melody Thelwell

**General Attendees:** Linda Carmona-Sanchez (AECE); Chris Duggan (via conference call); Marie Woodson (Miami-Dade County); Angela Messina (Miami-Dade County) (via conference call); Suzette Frazier (Department of Children and Families)

## I. Welcome and Introductions

- C. Lederman welcomed the committee and attendees.
  - A quorum was established with five (5) voting members.

## II. Approval of September 27<sup>th</sup> Minutes

- D. Williams moved to approve the September 27, 2011 minutes.
- A.K. Weller seconded the motion.
- Motion was unanimously passed.

## III. CEO Update

- E. Torres shared the CEO Update.
  - The Race to the Top application has been submitted by the governor's office. We will know more information in December. Other states that are competing are California and New York. If we do receive the grant, there will be a number of conversations that will take place to make decisions as to what steps will be taken going forward. The governor sent out a press release stating that he would only accept the dollars with no strings attached and under the condition that no new regulations be put in place with these funds. We cannot expect the State of Florida to contribute. The governor's concern is that we will receive the funds and implement programs that are not sustainable.
  - In terms of the budget, we are projecting a deficit of \$2.5 million. That deficit will probably be eliminated very soon so we are looking at all the children ages 0-5 who are currently on the School Readiness (SR) waitlist. We were notified by AWI that we have had significant drops in the BG-3 category due in part to the drug testing of welfare recipients. Drug testing has now stopped because of a court ruling. As a result, we might see the number go back up.



- S. Fagundo asked if we would move forward with the disenrollment of six year olds.
- E. Torres replied that we would not be disenrolling those children at this time.
- E. Torres stated that we have a very strong advocate in Dr. Mel Jurado who is the new director of the Office of Early Learning (OEL). She was the chair of the Hillsborough Early Learning Coalition for eight years. She reports directly to the governor.

#### **IV. Monroe Performance Report**

- M. Williams shared highlights from the Monroe performance report
  - D. Williams asked why the VPK monitoring visits have not begun.
  - M. Williams responded that there are only 24 VPK providers. There was an amendment to the contract that indicated that private providers would be monitored by Wesley House and the school district sites would be monitored by ELC staff. It is generally better to wait until the classroom has been in session for some time, to allow the provider time to get their routines established. Monitoring has begun for October so there should be information reported next month.

#### **V. Miami- Dade Performance Report**

- J. Russell gave highlights from the Miami-Dade performance report.

#### **VI. Feasibility Study**

- J. Russell reminded the committee of the information regarding implementing quality standards for providers to deliver school readiness services that Chris Duggan had shared at the previous committee meeting.
- C. Duggan discussed the approach the coalition may take, should we decide to move forward with implementing quality standards.
- Task I: Determine a minimum level of quality.
  - The proposed approach is based on how to ensure that all SR providers meet the quality level set by the ELC, and to enable the ELC to minimize the expenses and staff members' time.
  - We must first establish what the level of quality is expected , keeping in mind that this is a process based on compliance and not necessarily quality improvement.
  - We will need to establish what the process would be for current providers and what the process would be for any new providers entering the program.
  - The recommendation is that licensed SR providers score a 3.0 on the Environmental Rating Scale (ERS). This is the level that has been implemented by the majority of Early Learning Coalitions in the state. Only three coalitions are using a different tool than the ERS. The pro is that providers, especially those in Quality Counts are familiar with the ERS so this would not be an entirely new process. The con is that there is a high cost associated with doing the ERS. We will need to figure out how to make the cost reasonable.
  - E. Torres added that we will also need to consider what the cost to the provider would be in order to come into compliance.
  - Informal providers would need to meet the health and safety standards already established. A recommendation for school district sites has not yet been determined. C. Duggan will contact the other coalitions to see what they are doing.



- E. Torres added that the challenge with the school district is that they are license-exempt making it very difficult for us to impose a standard on them.
- Task II: Once the level of quality expected is determined, a procedure must be created.
  - Component A: Providers already in the Quality Counts program will use the ERS score they have already received. If a provider is in the Quality Counts program, they would be considered automatically in compliance.
  - Component B: Gold Seal providers would be grandfathered in for the first year. The coalition would reserve the right to perform a random unscheduled monitoring visit.
  - Component C: Current providers not in Quality Counts, nor having a gold seal would be required to meet the determined level of quality within the first contract year.
  - The recommended process includes time for improvement for providers who do not initially meet the standards and limited technical assistance. If the issues that need to be corrected are critical or of health and safety in nature, the time needed to resolve them should be very short.
- Task III: Establish initial contract and monitoring process.
  - SR providers must score a 3 or higher before the provider contract is signed. If they do not meet the standards, basic technical assistance may be offered.
  - By requiring a program to meet an expected level of quality prior to signing a contract, the Early Learning Coalition would ensure that children would be enrolled in quality programs.
  - The process for current providers would begin with a provider orientation, where the ERS tool would be reviewed, and demonstrated to providers how it is aligned with the School Readiness statute and licensing requirements. The orientation would include how providers can do a self-assessment, the timeline for doing so, and how to do a program improvement plan.
  - The process for assessment would be the same that is utilized by Quality Counts. Technical assistance would be offered on a limited basis. Family child care homes would be assessed using the FCCH Environmental Rating Scale. Afterschool care sites would be assessed using the School Age ERS.
- C. Duggan shared a workflow chart explaining the process for Flagler and Volusia counties
  - E. Torres asked if Flagler and Volusia were conducting the ERS themselves or do they contract it out. C. Duggan responded that their staff does it themselves. Only Orange County contracts the ERS out to Devereux.
  - C. Duggan stated that the process starts with a new provider orientation for those who have expressed interest in participating in the SR program, where they would receive a thorough explanation of the contract and regulations.
  - If the provider wants to contract, they would submit a contract along with the required documentation to the coalition. An assessment would not take place unless the packet is correct and complete. Once the contract packet has been reviewed, the provider will be contacted by a provider services manager who will set up the ERS appointment.
  - The provider would be required to score a 3.0 or higher in order to participate in SR. If the center meets the minimum score, they would receive a congratulatory letter along with the signed agreement. If the



provider does not meet the minimum score on the ERS they would receive a decline letter. They would then have 10 days to submit a grievance. If the provider declines to grieve, then they would have to wait a year before they are able to apply again. If a grievance is submitted and is found to be invalid, they would also need to wait a year before reapplying.

- M. Abety asked what providers, particularly in the lower income areas, would typically score on the ERS and what the impact would be if we took this into account. If we were to assess our current providers today, how many would be assessed at a 3.0 or higher?
- S. Fagundo added that she also had the same concern. Of the providers who entered the Quality Counts program, almost 70% scored below a 3. We need to look at this geographically and assess the serious impact this will have on the high-need areas.
- C. Duggan responded that the process was only a proposal. During the development, we could do a sampling to get a better idea of where we stand.
- Dr. C. Hughes added that using the quality counts baseline gives us a good idea of where our providers stand. Since it is an initial assessment, as is, it accurately reflects the true level of quality of the center. This will give us a better idea of what needs to be done to get these providers to the minimum quality level.
- C. Duggan stated that perhaps during the development process, we could look at only using some components of the ERS. This might make it a more reasonable process.
- Dr. C. Hughes added that assessing fewer components still would not reduce the amount of time and money needed to do the assessment.
- E. Torres asked what the cost is per assessment. J. Russell responded that it is a little under \$1,000.
- S. Fagundo stated that moving forward we need to seriously consider the cost. This might result in more providers wanting to move into Quality Counts.
- M. Abety stated that part of the impetus behind Quality Counts is the desire to significantly increase the number of 4 and 5 star level centers located in low income areas serving the greatest number of kids that could benefit from a high quality education. The balance struggle is how to attract higher quality providers to serve those areas. How do we lift those 1 and 2 star level providers? Setting the bar where 70% of our providers do not rate, is unsettling.
- E. Torres added that we might want to explore assessment tools other than the ERS.
- C. Duggan shared that other counties have developed their own assessment tool.
- Dr. C. Hughes suggested looking at other widely used assessment tools before considering something self-developed.
- S. Fagundo stated that we also need to look at the reimbursement rate in other communities. Miami-Dade County pays its providers the bare minimum, She stated that she spent nearly \$5,000 preparing for the Devereux visit. Her average cost has increased to nearly \$1,500 monthly, for the purposes of improvement. We need to realize that it is difficult to find extra money, especially in low income areas.
- C. Lederman stated that we should proceed with assembling an expert committee to discuss further.
- E. Torres stated that we need to go back to the initial discussion about what the minimum requirements to contract with the ELC should be. We are hearing from higher quality providers that the coalition contracts with everyone so they are not able to fill their centers.



- M. Abety asked what we do in areas where there are not high quality centers. We must find a way to incentivize those centers in lower income areas who are trying to improve the quality of their centers.
- J. Russell added that there is already a workgroup, including L. Carmona, Y. Borroto, S. Fagundo and Dr. C. Hughes and others, in place to discuss the minimum requirements.
- C. Lederman suggested that the workgroup also speak to Duval and Flagler counties.

## **VII. New Business**

- S. Fagundo thanked L. Carmona for her efforts with the VPK rulemaking that came from the Department of Education. L. Carmona's work helped to clarify what the implications of changing the cutoff on the VPK assessment without a pre and post test would be. Changing the cutoff to 70% would cause 64% of our providers to receive a Low Performing Provider (LPP) status.
- M. Abety asked how many of our providers are FACCM members. S. Fagundo responded that all APPLE accredited providers are also FACCM members.
- M. Abety stated that FACCM must be held accountable for their actions to impede our Race to the Top application; a tremendous source of funding to lift quality in our centers.
- E. Torres added that FACCM worked very hard to keep the governor from signing the Race to the Top application. They misrepresented the idea behind the application. They later issued an apology from the chair of FACCM about a quote that was in the newspaper.
- M. Abety added that because of their efforts, the governor has said that if we are awarded the grant, he may not accept the funds, because of some of the questions that FACCM has raised.
- E. Torres stated that the governor has maintained his position on less regulation and no additional dollars to be spent on it. FACCM has used this to say that coalitions are creating additional burdens and regulations around the state and not improving quality.
- C. Lederman suggested that we make it known to members of FACCM who may be unaware of the position that FACCM took on the Race to the Top application.
- E. Torres stated that there is a commitment from both the governor's office and Dr. Mel Jurado that these dollars will be used to lift quality and not to add regulations.
- C. Lederman moved to draft a letter of response to FACCM.
  - S. Fagundo seconded the motion
  - Motion was unanimously passed.

## **VIII. Public Comment**

- L. Carmona stated that when speaking about prerequisites we need to ask ourselves exactly what we are looking for in order to choose the right tools to do so. FLKRS is not a measure of progress. It merely assesses where a child is and not their gains. This tool is not an adequate measure of progress. The most important indicator of high quality is the adult in the classroom. We need to look at the components that concern education.

## **IX. Adjourn.**

- C. Lederman adjourned the meeting.