

Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care
May 11, 2023 Meeting Minutes

5/11 - Blue Ribbon Panelists in Attendance:

Emily Byrne, Executive Director of Connecticut Voices for Children; Representative Jeffrey Currey; Jamie Eden, Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Communications for Boehringer Ingelheim; Diana Jepsen, Community Member and former Communications Specialist for several Fortune 500 companies, including GE, United Technologies, Cigna, and Covidien; Dr. William Johnson, Director of Educational Strategy for the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund; Katherine Lantigua, Program Director for Katherine Lantigua Family Child Care; Karen Lott, Executive Director of the Women's League Child Development Center; Althea Marshall-Brooks, Executive Director of Waterbury Bridge to Success Community Partnership; Representative Kathleen McCarty; Garrett Moran, Former Chairperson of the Governor's Workforce Council and Former President of Year Up; Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents; Jessica Sager, Co-founder and CEO of All Our Kin; Maria Del Pilar Vargas, Member of the Office of Early Childhood's Parent Cabinet and Educational Coach for Licensed Family Child Care Providers for United Way.

Speakers/Presenters: The Honorable Harry Rilling, Mayor of Norwalk; Cheryl DeVonish, Chief Executive Officer, Norwalk Community College; The Honorable Beth Bye, Commissioner, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood; Dr. Dan Wuori, Senior Director of Early Learning, The Hunt Institute; Dr. Junlei Li, Co-chair, Human Development and Education Programs, and Saul Zaentz, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education; Georgia Goldburn, Executive Director, Hope for New Haven; Marc Jaffe, Chief Executive Officer, Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County; Emily Peña, Family Child Care Partnership Manager, TEAM Inc.; Allyx Schiavone, Executive Director, Friends Center for Children; Hussein Nicole Villanueva, Child Care Incubator Project Coordinator, YWCA New Britain; Elizabeth Brown, Advisory Board Working Cities Challenge / RIBA Aspira, Waterbury; Elizabeth Quinones, Program Director, United Way of Western Connecticut / Cora's Kids, Danbury; Johnathan Gibson, Chief Executive Officer, The Maritime Odyssey Preschool; Ms. Prema Winn, Executive Director, The Odyssey Family Executive of South Norwalk; Eileen Ward, Director, Children's Community Development Center; Deborah Watson, OEC Project Manager, Lab Schools Investment Initiative; Elsa Jones, CSCU Project Director, Lab Schools Investment Initiative; Eva Bermúdez-Zimmerman, Co-Chair, Childcare for Connecticut's Future / SEIU CSEA Childcare & Organizing Director; Dr. Robert Pennington, Assistant Superintendent, Norwalk Public Schools; Amaris Melendez, Education Administrator for Early Childhood, Norwalk Public Schools; Erica Phillips, Executive Director, National Association for Family Child Care; Alissa Mwenelupembe, Managing Director of Early Learning, National Association for the Education of Young Children; Rhian Allvin, Chief Executive Officer, Brynmor Holdings.

Welcome and Charge to the Panel:

Cheryl DeVonish, Chief Executive Officer, Norwalk Community College called the meeting to order and introduced The Honorable Harry Rilling, Mayor of Norwalk.

Cheryl DeVonish welcomed and thanked the Blue Ribbon Panel members and attendees.

- Norwalk Community College is proud to be part of the conversation and to help develop the pipeline for future providers in the early education space.
- Addressed the workforce development issue across the state.
- Encouraged access to quality early childhood education and facilities for all.

Mayor Harry Rilling addressed the panel and the event attendees.

- Acknowledged the importance of early childhood care due to the crucial development of the child during the early years.
- Highlighted the need to look at compensation for early child care providers and the importance of keeping good people employed in that field.
- “Child care providers are the workforce behind the workforce. People are able to work because they have affordable and effective child care for their children.”

Community Conversations: Goals and Expectations:

Commissioner Bye shared thanks to all partners who made today’s event possible and established the goal of today’s event:

- NCC and Cheryl DeVonish for the setting and providing today’s technologies
- The Hunt Institute and Dan Wuori for making this panel’s work possible
- Connecticut Early Childhood Funder Collaborative through the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy for lunch and gift cards to get books for programs
- The team at OEC for all their work to share information and technical assistance
- SVP and Monisha on all the efforts to make today special
- Today is about the early childhood education workforce. The goal is to hear from national experts on why workforce matters, and to hear from folks here in Connecticut and nationally on what’s happening; and how CT can move forward and improve our system. Work to provide different perspectives for the solution. “Today is a great recipe for success.”

Commissioner Bye introduced Monisha Gibson, Director of Early Childhood Strategy at Social Venture Partners Connecticut, and Dan Wuori, Senior Director of Early Learning at The Hunt Institute.

Monisha Gibson welcomed the panel and its attendees, and encouraged them to speak their voice on today’s subjects.

Dan Wuori welcomed the panel and its attendees.

Leading for Young Children:

Dan Wuori introduced Dr. Junlei Li, Co-chair, Human Development and Education Programs, and Saul Zaentz, Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Junlei Li presented Achieving Quality with Equity: Understanding What is Deep and Simple in the Work of Early Childhood.

- Focus on early relationships through day-to-day interactions

- Can be difficult to find a direct connection between a quality system and the outcomes the children have – there’s often no association between star system structure and actual outcome of children
- The Early Childhood System is a complex balancing act – as we move forward to renew or redesign our system, the panel should look to build a system that restores the balance where everything has its place. Shifting the idea of ratings to relationships, compliance to trust, credentials to community. Reconsider credentials as a gatekeeper to compensation.
- “Safe, stable and nurturing relationships are promoted in safe, stable and nurturing families that have access to safe, stable and nurturing communities with a wide range of resources and services.” – American Academy of Pediatrics
- “Deep and simple is far more essential than shallow and complex.” – Fred Rogers
- Need to consider early childhood system as each of us in the center of a ripple, and what we do touches human beings and the relationships between these human beings and whatever part we play in the system we can hold ourselves up to a simple and deep question: “How can our work help to encourage, enrich, and empower human relationships around children, families and their helpers?”

The Voices of Connecticut Leaders: Panel and Discussion:

Dan Wuori introduced panelists and led a discussion based on their unique points of view. Panel members included Georgia Goldburn, Executive Director, Hope for New Haven; Marc Jaffe, Chief Executive Officer, Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County; Emily Peña, Family Child Care Partnership Manager, TEAM Inc.; Allyx Schiavone, Executive Director, Friends Center for Children

- Discussion with panelists
 - Topics discussed:
 - Each panelist defined their unique perspective within the child care field and from the lens of their position
 - How federal dollars received impacted their programs
 - What they want the Blue Ribbon Panel to know
 - Connecticut landscape in relation to the field as a whole
 - Workforce framework
 - Connecticut’s future
 - Public funding as a solution

Breakout Sessions:

Topics included:

- Innovation: Connecticut Child Care Business Incubators
- Innovation: Connecticut Workforce Pipeline Pilots
- Higher Education: Lab Schools
- Advocacy: Childcare for Connecticut’s Future
- Public School Partnership: Norwalk Public Schools

Reflections on Connecticut's Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce and Today's Conversations:

Commissioner Bye introduced Rhian Allvin, Chief Executive Officer, Brynmor Holdings, who shared her insights from the day by highlighting the following key points:

- CT is bucking the trend of not having a quality rating improvement system and that there is not a perfect definition of quality
- Need for professional salaries, retirement benefits, health insurance
- Relationships matter
- Focus on a defined set of knowledge skills and competencies to be an early childhood educator and a continuum of competencies
- Look at the unique circumstances and the inaccessibility that exists for FCC providers
- She summarized some key suggestions, including:
 - Thinking of child care as a business in the same way we think of attracting hospitals/manufacturing/etc. – tax incentives and tax credits, etc.
 - Investing in the system that it takes to do the work – set expectations, hire people, pay professional salaries, give them practice autonomy like we do with nurse/healthcare workers
 - Focus on the finances of the system – pay the actual cost of care, not arbitrary market rates – build in professional salaries, health insurance, retirement
 - Pay for the subsidy system – pay for enrollment not attendance – costs are the same regardless of attendance – pay in 12 month contracts
 - Provide debt-free college education

Concluding Remarks:

Commissioner Bye concluded the meeting:

- Expressed gratitude that Governor Lamont centers this panel and stresses the importance of it
- CT has a very responsive electorate: last session we demanded more and the legislators heard us
 - They added a significant amount of funds last session, but it's not sufficient enough
- Need to look to other folks and businesses for additional federal funding
- Encouraged attendees to look at our systems and simplify them to make them work for them and their families