

Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care
September 13, 2023 Sharing Session Minutes
Norwich, Three Rivers Community College

Welcome/Agenda:

Commissioner Bye called the meeting to order and shared the objective of the session: to review the Blue Ribbon Panel Draft Outline and hear feedback from parents and providers.

Commissioner Bye and Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy presented the context of the Blue Ribbon Panel, its pillars, and the goals and objectives of the Outline.

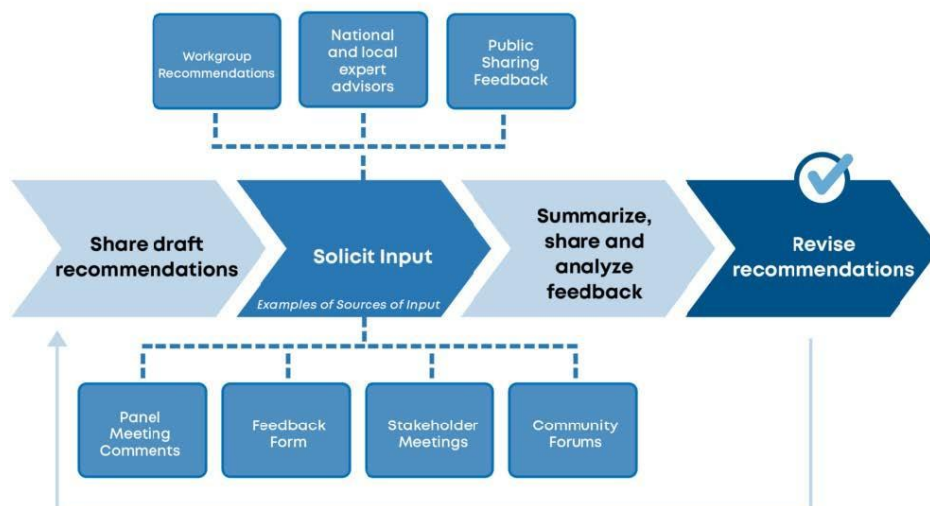
Blue Ribbon Panel Context:

The Charge to the Blue Ribbon Panel:

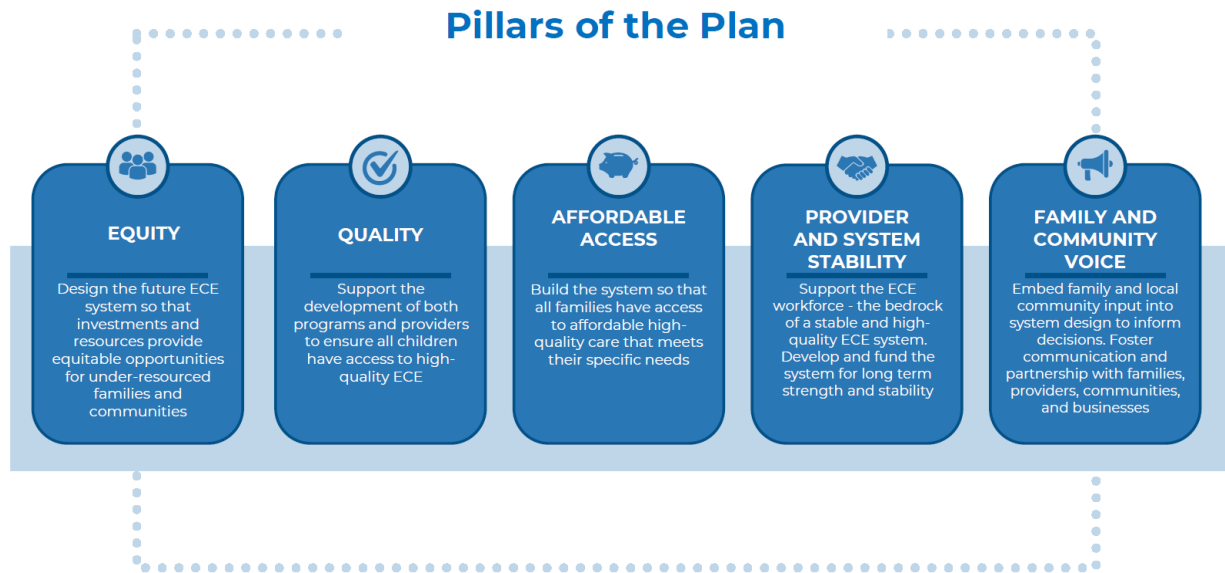
- The Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care was initiated by Governor Lamont's Executive Order.
- The Panel is charged with developing a strategic plan for a child care system that works for families, providers, and Connecticut's economy.
- The Panel will outline a data-driven, actionable, 5-year strategic plan for Connecticut that supports family needs, business needs, and prioritizes equitable access to early care and education.

Feedback and Iteration:

- The recommendations presented today are the result of several months of input and iteration from workgroups, advisors, stakeholder meetings, and public feedback.
- The draft outline will be reviewed and updated by the Blue Ribbon Panel and used to write the final plan that will be submitted to the Governor.

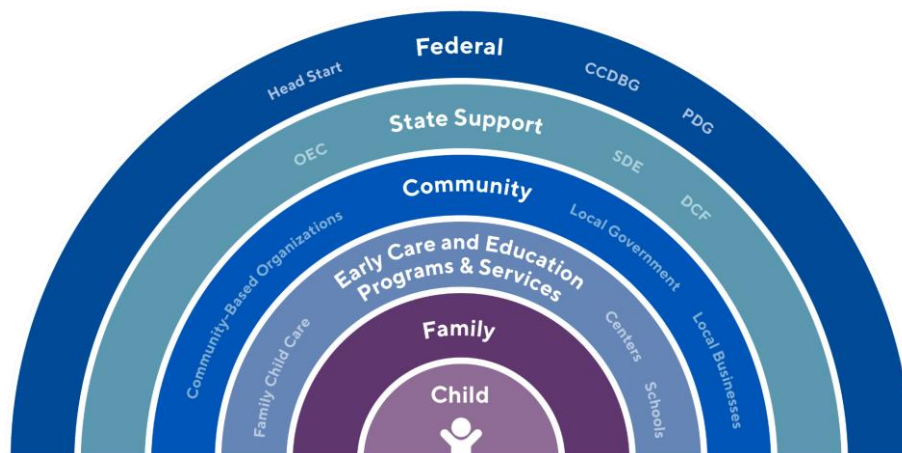


Draft Outline Review:



Overarching Vision for the 5-Year Plan

- **WHAT:** All families will have access to an **equitable, high-quality, and affordable** early childhood education (ECE) system. Building on investments the State has made, this plan will **center on the needs of children and families**, enabling children to learn and thrive, and families to work.
- **HOW:** Implemented over 5 years, the plan will **prioritize historically under-resourced groups and communities** and will take care to **honor the existing workforce**.
- **WHY:** A strong ECE system will benefit our **communities and economy** by helping to attract and retain young families, increase workforce participation – especially among women – and grow the State’s economy.



The envisioned system aims to benefit families, providers, and communities:

Families:

- More **accessible and affordable high-quality child care** that meets all families' needs.
- Access to **information and resources** to help families find the care they need.
- Greater opportunities to **lead and advocate** at all levels of the system.

Providers:

- More **funding and resources** to compensate and support the professional growth of educators.
- Access to more affordable **health insurance** options.
- **Simplified systems** to reduce administrative burdens on programs.
- Greater **enrollment and program operations support** to enable efficiencies and stability.
- **Facilities funding** and incentives for addressing unmet needs, accessible by all types of programs.

Communities:

- **Representation of all local stakeholders** to ensure that families, providers, local municipalities, schools, businesses, and community leaders have a voice.
- **State-wide local governance structures** to efficiently and equitably allocate resources based on the specific needs of a community.
- Access to **accurate and timely local information** to make informed decisions that help communities thrive.

Blue Ribbon Panel Plan Goals

Goal 1:

- **Workforce:** Invest in and support the retention and recruitment of a professional, high-quality ECE workforce.

Goal 2:

- **Equitable Access:** Increase affordable access that meets the range of family needs, and prioritizes under-resourced groups and communities.

Goal 3:

- **Families and Community Voice:** Elevate family and community voice to develop an equitable and responsive ECE system.

Goal 4:

- **Systems and Funding:** Build a high-quality and well-funded ECE system that maximizes current resources, supports economically viable programs, and is poised to efficiently leverage future investment.

Goal 1: Workforce Objectives

- **Objective 1A:** Invest in and promote policies that support the professional compensation of early childhood educators in centers, family child care homes, and schools.

- **Objective 1B:** Pursue strategies that support worker recruitment and retention, and build education and training programs for skilled, diverse ECE educators and staff (e.g., apprenticeships, high school CDA, retraining from other fields).
- **Objective 1C:** Adopt a three-step career ladder that aligns with the Unifying Framework and links career advancement with compensation, following an implementation timeline and stakeholder input process that ensures any new system supports all providers.
- **Objective 1D:** Create and expand successful strategies to support educators in increasing the quality of early childhood programs.

Goal 2: Equitable Access Objectives

- **Objective 2A:** Expand affordability for low- and middle-income families, committing to expanding Care 4 Kids eligibility to households earning up to 100% of State Median Income (SMI) over 3 years; and phasing in a parent co-pay level of a maximum of 7% of family income (TBD).
- **Objective 2B:** Increase equitable access to high-quality programs to meet the needs of children and families, especially for infant/toddler care, children with special needs, and under-resourced families and communities (e.g., incentives for expanding infant and toddler slots, contracted infant and toddler slots, Smart Start, facility funding).

Goal 3: Family and Community Voice Objectives

- **Objective 3A:** Recognize, empower, and embed families as central and valued decision-makers in the development of an equitable ECE system.
- **Objective 3B:** Expand and fund community-informed governance with regional supports that utilize a common needs assessment for an equitable and responsive ECE system.

Goal 4: Systems and Funding Objectives

- **Objective 4A:** Simplify State-funded system and better align with federal systems to reduce complexity and increase utility for providers, families, and the State.
- **Objective 4B:** Assess true cost of quality care and develop a plan to transition to funding based on this true cost, starting with infant and toddler care, and high need communities.
- **Objective 4C:** Maximize existing resources by strengthening programs and partnerships to improve enrollment, and reduce administrative burdens and redundant costs.
- **Objective 4D:** Develop data and information systems, including a provider and parent portal, and navigation systems, to track and improve systems and outcomes.
- **Objective 4E:** Develop a flexible fiscal model to support implementation, and help to prioritize and stage investments.
- **Objective 4F:** Identify new funding streams that will support sustained and significant incremental investment in ECE.

Breakout Group:

- The 7% co-pay level is still unaffordable for families and can be a very high amount depending on the family's income – especially for those who are provided housing from their employer.
- Raising compensation resonated with the group, but there were questions about where the money would come from, what policies would be invested in, and what those policies look like
- In the eastern part of the state, many families work non-traditional hours, so they are not eligible for Care 4 Kids
- Concern that 5 years is too long to enact this plan - centers and programs will close within this time frame
- Special needs children and children with disabilities are at an all-time high and teachers aren't trained to work with these children – this causes burnout for teachers and thus impacts retention rates
- Keeping in mind that if we raise compensation for teachers, they may lose access to other benefits (food stamps, HUSKY, etc.) – in some cases, these benefits are more important to families than the compensation raise
- There is a need for additional staff support in regard to training
- Shifting the narrative to show that teaching is an important and vital profession and also pays well will attract people to the field
 - Manufacturing pipeline (Electric Boat) is a good example of this; look into how this is funded and how to utilize in the child care industry
- Focus on providing funds based on capacity instead of by student, contracts instead of grants, and consider the costs for having to keep a facility open even if there are fewer? students in the classroom
 - If you fund by classroom versus by student, you could in turn service more children since it's not as restrictive by nature
 - This is especially true in rural areas
- Reimbursement timeline doesn't align with spending; programs/towns have to carry hundreds of thousands of dollars to sustain business before those dollars roll in
- The eastern part of the state faces different challenges compared to New Haven and other areas; perhaps use this area as a pilot/launching point
 - No southeastern CT community colleges mentioned as a partner for the workforce pipeline
- Tap into alternative markets for a funding stream (cannabis)
- Corporate daycares don't work
- For regional governance, there's a concern that the money is going to travel through different systems before it gets to the frontlines, leaving the frontline staff with "scraps"
 - Each town has different rules and regulations – it could become problematic to manage under this structure

- Interest in the Tri-Share model
- For workforce, need to continue conversations with Congress to resolve immigration issues/system
- In the eastern part of the state, there's a lot of stress on parents because of the commute – this region of the state is where people live, not work, so child care centers are limited and full, and home daycare waiting lists are too long
- Challenges for families who live in MA/RI/NY, but work in CT, so they can't utilize our child care facilities
- The operating hours of child care are extremely difficult for working families
- Used CHEFA (Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority) as an example of tax-exempt bonds that helped child care providers improve their facilities
 - Now CIF (Community Investment Fund), but concern over how much money is actually able to go around
- For the workforce and benefits, many child care providers are losing staff to the OEC or public school opportunities; ensuring that providers don't lose other state benefits by increasing compensation; acknowledging the facility in which people work in – it's a prideful point and if the facility is outdated, providers will look for other places to work
- Discussion about 5-year-olds who don't qualify for pre-schools
- CT State Community Colleges are canceling courses for ECE curriculum due to lack of enrollment, but these classes are critical for the workforce

Next Steps:

Commissioner Bye thanked all participants for their attendance and feedback, and shared the timeline for reviewing and finalizing plan recommendations:

- Sept 20th: Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting to review outline and suggest revisions
- Sept 30th: Deadline for feedback on draft plan outline
- Nov 1st: Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting to review draft of final report contents
- Dec 6th: Blue Ribbon Panel submits plan to Governor's Office

Commissioner Bye encouraged people to use the online feedback link to provide any additional thoughts they may have.