

Preschool for All Task Force Meeting Notes

September 26th, 9:00-11:00, State of Oregon Building, 800 NE Oregon St.

In attendance: Andrea Paluso, Andrew Hoan, Sadie Feibel (for Carmen Rubio), Diana Nunez, Guadalupe Guerrero, Jenn Lynch, Commissioner Vega Pederson, Kali Thorne Ladd, Keith Thomajan, Ken Richardson, Ken Thrasher, Kim Melton, Dee Hayward (for Lee Po Cha), Lisa Pellegrino, Lydia Gray-Holifield, Maggie Bennington-Davis, Mark Holloway, Marvin Lynn, Michael Buonocore, Michael Lopes-Serrao, Mystique Pratcher, Tawna Sanchez, Petra Hernandez, Ruth Adkins, Dana Hepper (for Swati Adarkar), Tara Cooper, Pam Greenhough Corrie (for Lisa Skari), Megan Irwin

Welcome, introductions, and orientation to work

Today is about building the foundation for our work. We can't make policy choices for families unless you know and understand them. Today is about listening to the voices of parents and engaging in a meaningful way. We will also have a chance to engage with EcoNorthwest's data, which will give us a macro-view of who our families that we are serving are.

How we got here, our focus & frame

Vice Chair Mark Holloway:

- Social Venture Partners has been helping to craft the story that we're bringing to you today along with United Way & Early Learning Multnomah (ELM). We began convening six years ago. The community said to us that the priority population for us to focus on is kids in poverty, kids of color, and kids whose home language is not English. We're proud to hold the question, not give an answer. Now it is time for this group to answer the question with a real community response.

Chair Vega Pederson:

- A lot of groundwork has been laid in Oregon on the importance of early learning. Now it's time to turn it into a reality so that we can serve the children of our community.
- We want to focus here on the 2 years before a child enters kindergarten: 3, 4, and 5 year-olds. We're looking at those two years as having an impact and preparing kids to succeed in kindergarten academically and socially.
- We want to have high-quality programs, and we include cultural responsiveness in the definition of "high quality".
- We're going to focus on Multnomah County. This is going to be a much bigger than Multnomah County as an organization - we're looking at the county geographic area.
- Research has shown that the kids who benefit most from these programs are lower income, from communities of color, or non-English speakers at home. We want to center those kids in our discussions.
- This work will be informed by the work of our subcommittees that are digging into different areas. We have four subcommittees, plus our Parent Advisory group. A very important group is the Early Learning Multnomah (ELM) Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). They will serve as an ongoing sounding board for our discussions. I want to thank ELM and United Way for helping to staff and support that.

- We want to make sure you know that we realize this isn't happening in a vacuum. The Governor has a Preschool Access Initiative, and I spoke to legislators on Monday about how we can increase the State's investments in early learning.

Megan Irwin:

- *Used PowerPoint presentation to explain group processes and support structure. Emphasized that the group will follow the following steps prior to a decision point:*
 - *Issue exploration, Idea formulation, Proposal discussion, Agreement testing*
- *The framework for voting shall be:*
 - *Approval, Acceptable, Rejection*
- *This group shall strive for an 80% approval rate to move forward.*
- *Explained timeline of work using PowerPoint presentation*

Engaging with what families told us

The aim of this exercise is to build a strong foundation grounded in parents' voices. Thanks to ELM and IRCO, we've been able to pull out some of those voices. You will engage with each of these quotes on the wall and read each one. We want you to pay attention to which quote resonates the most with you - which one will be in your brain later today?

Megan: I want to first give the floor to the parent representatives in the room. These quotes are not fully representative of all families in Multnomah County. We'll continue to pull in new voices as we get them. Let's give the parents in the room the chance to reflect & share their thoughts.

- *Parent:* We should give opportunity to all because some kids don't qualify for programs due to their family's income. So my daughter was accepted into a program, but she was on a waitlist for almost two years. That was with my first daughter, my second one took almost two years to get onto a waitlist. We were living paycheck-to-paycheck and even then you may not qualify for a spot. That was my case, and there are a lot of other people in that situation. It is also difficult if you don't have transportation to take your kid to school. That happened to me, but thank god they were able to start preschool.
- *Parent:* I did see up there that we have to make sure that when we set up these preschools that the parents are included because they are the child's first teacher. We need to provide the child with someone who looks like them or speaks their language - teachers need to come from our community. I want to see us teaching parents how to be good teachers so they can be self-sufficient, and then they are invested in their child's education, and they can take that anywhere. Don't take away from mom & pop preschools, don't forget we want to include parents in training and education.
- *Parent:* I've been a volunteer at Albina Head Start for 12 years. The teachers are taking it upon themselves to speak Spanish to the children, but it is not a requirement. Children should be encouraged to learn non-English languages. Remember that there are many languages that need to be represented in the curriculum and materials.

What did others notice or feel stood out?

- There is a lack of cultural responsiveness: institutional racism, individual racism, and unconscious bias. Research has shown that these negative impacts on black children start in preschool. If we have a history of black parents being pushed out of schools, what are we doing to make that right and bring them into the process? We need to recognize that learning is happening at home. We need to recognize that isn't up here.

- We need to give caregivers the chance to afford childcare and a life. Often, childcare workers can't afford to give their own children an education.
- We use poverty as a threshold to determine need, but we need to do away with that because middle-income families are struggling too. We must provide culturally-responsive education in ways the children can recognize. I'm concerned about your methodology - how do you bring this to this group with so many missing voices? It frustrates me that black parents and Latinx voices aren't there. We have to be better. If we're going to get buy-in, we need to make sure that the process is inclusive.
 - *Megan Irwin:* We appreciate your feedback. We will do better. We will do that and bring it back at the next conversation. I also heard commitments to cultural responsiveness and committing to linguistic responsiveness. I appreciate your tough feedback, I apologize, and we will do better next time.
- I'm struck by the cluster about the threshold of resources. I commit to not buying into the myth of self-sufficiency, because it continues to perpetuate poverty. How do we build structures that minimize the impacts of poverty?
- We have to talk about preschool versus preschool-like experiences. It's all about the experience, not the particular building they are in. I had some parents from the Latinx community say that their job is to be a mom. How do we give tools to people that they can use in the home? It needs to include both preschool and preschool-like experiences.
- I commit to creating a model that recognizes language, culture, and assets. We need to go beyond - we need to intentionally interrupt bias and we can't just recreate the same systems that have perpetuated racism and injustice.
- Parents want their child to be ready for kindergarten. They want early academic, social, and language skills. They want all that while having their home culture celebrated. They want to be true partners in their child's education.
- Something needs to happen with the parents - maybe some type of network so they can understand how they can be involved in preschool. Immigrants & refugees may have culture shock - they need a way to learn the system. We should create a community for them before their children enter preschool.
- It is important throughout this process that we find ways to return to the voices of parents that have come back in front of us. I think this is a good exercise, but I didn't have to challenge myself. We need to not continually refer to our typical way of doing business. I commit to consistently center those voices here as well as the voices that have been excluded. We should commit to pushing ourselves.
- We should try to do things we think can't be done. Things like the timeframe of schools, funding issues, oppressive fines for late pick-ups - those aren't ok. These are things that a lot of people struggle with, and we say "well, we need this" - but do we?

Presentation on data

Melissa Rowe from EcoNorthwest used a PowerPoint presentation to present macro-level data.

- Is it possible that the data underrepresents immigrant and undocumented families?
- Is there an estimate of how many 5 year olds that are not in kindergarten there are?
- We should look at the parent's response surveys on kindergarten registration forms.

- You can see how the challenge is compounded: by access families have, and by the quality of education that they are receiving. A third of our kindergarteners are not consistently coming to school in PPS. The challenge is in recovering from those compounded factors.
- Are non-formal settings, such as friends and family, included in this data?

Megan: This is the kind of data and information that policymakers often use to inform their thinking, and it certainly has a role. What we want to hear and understand from you is: what implications do you think this data has for your work, and how do you want to use it?

- There is a clear inequity between the west and east sides of the county.
- Finding a way to hear from communities about what is important is valuable. Data lags and it doesn't show what's happening in the market.
- We should discuss the origins of the workforce. I'm curious about where the educators are actually located.
- We should look at the possibility of adding data around the preschool-like experiences. Lifting that up is an important piece.
- Can we create a dashboard or continue to fill out the picture of the current landscape and what we want it to look like?
- Zoning is designed around racialized factors. We need to think about that in terms of the program we develop.
- Could it be geography-bound or can we do it in other ways?
- What is it about the places that they're choosing that they like, and that make them be willing to pay higher prices?
- Let's not create a system that creates regulations that have to be maneuvered around.
- I would like to see this map without the regulated private centers on it.
- How do we manage the barrier of families having access to programs but not access to transportation?

Final thoughts & next steps

- *Commissioner Vega Pederson:* This has been a wonderful conversation. Thank you Megan for grounding us in the importance of parents' voices as well as data. My takeaway is that data is never complete and we need to work beyond the data to create a system that works for families. We'll be meeting again at this location on Halloween and we'll be talking about other communities across the country that have made a similar commitment. I appreciate everybody's engagement and commitment to this work.
- *Megan Irwin:* I'm going to take all the comments received today and turn that into a draft document that will articulate your statements of commitments. It will also capture policy implications for you to review. At the next meeting you will review that draft and workshop. That will then be your foundation for choices that will be made later in this process. Hopefully with the goal of not creating systems of oppression.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 am