

## Early Childhood Education Cabinet Meeting Update on ECE Quality Improvement

January 14, 2008

### Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS) Plan Development

The Early Childhood Research and Policy Council, through CHEFA, has engaged the services of Dr. Peg Oliveira for a month or two, to pull together a *CT ECE Quality Improvement Resource Notebook*. The project, suggested in early conversation with national experts Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney, will accumulate descriptive materials on all Connecticut efforts related to ECE quality improvement, enhancement, and enforcement -- beginning with center-based preschool programs. It will also attempt to provide an indication of the fiscal resources that support this. The assistance of Early Childhood Education Cabinet members is sought in this effort.<sup>1</sup>

The Notebook will become a key resource as we host an open forum to launch the process of QRIS plan development on February 7th in the a.m. National experts, Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney, will help organize this knowledge development event and will facilitate it. They have also agreed to become a part of our national QRIS TA team along with Reeva Murphy from NCCIC. We have also met with Lynn Kagan of the national Accountability TF to understand their key recommendations and to determine if we might become a partner state with their next stage efforts. Please note that the national assessment TF recommended that states develop one core assessment measure for all programs, so that a common base of quality could be established and enhanced. The Connecticut QRIS Plan will include a common Quality Rating Scale. (QRS).

Mitchell and Stoney indicate that there are 14 states which have done an ECE Quality Rating Scale already and many are working really well. We will, over time, bring some representatives from a couple of these states to CT so we can learn directly from them. PA is one of them, and we plan to invite Harriet Dichter to come up to spend a day with us in the early spring.

Also, at the recommendation of Mitchell and Stoney, we will be constructing a "by-invitation" QRIS working group (hosted by the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council, as per Cabinet action in July 2007) of some 25-30 folks representing key sectors and stakeholder groups. Our national TA folks indicate that a group larger than this makes the development process unwieldy, but we also commit to selecting "hub" participants who make a commitment to provide information back and forth to key constituencies. Also, we commit to a rich public input process in development of the QRIS Plan and its component parts, including the Quality Rating Scale. The prep work needed to get us to this point has been performed by the following individuals, working as a team: Representative Beth Bye, Joyce Staples, Dr. Carlota Schechter and Dr. Janice Gruendel.

The evolving timeline for this work is anchored in the statutory requirement, passed in the 2007 legislative session, to produce and report back to the Committees of Cognizance within the CGA on the QRIS Plan and a Quality Rating Scale by December 2008. Some key target dates are already emerging: Launching in February and bringing back a report/plan/recommendations to the Cabinet for a first reading no later than October 2008, followed by adoption in November 2008, and then a report to the Governor and the legislature in December 2008. Mitchell and Stoney indicate that this time frame is do-able with proper commitment and staffing support. Once the contract has been let for logistics, management and analytic support for the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council (expect by mid-January in response to a recent RFP), overall project management for this work will pass to that entity.

The Connecticut *Early Childhood Investment Plan, Part 1* (November 2006) proposed a framework for this effort:

*The Council further recommends the creation of a central early childhood education Program Improvement Project that is tied to the QRS but has a regional system (emphasis mine) of support for programs to work*

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*on quality enhancement projects. Programs would be required to develop program improvement plans based on their quality rating evaluation and the Project would provide technical and financial support for these activities. The Project should work collaboratively with or be associated with accreditation support and interdisciplinary consultation initiatives and the proposed Early Childhood Policy and Research Institute."*<sup>2</sup>

### **Legislative Requirement for Cabinet Minimum Quality Standards for SFY 08**

The 2007 legislature also required the Cabinet to establish a set of "minimum quality standards" for award of new preschool funding within the School Readiness Program for SFY 08. This requirement evolved from a period of intense conversation with the CT General Assembly in the later spring of 2007. A Cabinet working group (the Goal One ECE Systems Working Group) then met for several months on this and related topics. After much intense dialog (one might even say "debate"), the group voted to bring forth a set of five minimum standards to for "new/expanded SRP slots" to the Cabinet.<sup>3</sup>

The five recommended standards were: (a) national accreditation from one of several entities; (b) meet SRP quality requirements as per existing legislation; (c) teachers meet SRP qualifications by November 2007; (d) be licensed by DPH; and (5) receive an ECERS within six months of new slot award. The Cabinet adopted four of the five "minimum standards" recommendations, determining that the licensure recommendation would require some focus group work with the public school sector and an analysis of the need for additional licensure resources for DPH. This work has now been conducted the State Department of Education, with results to be reported back to the Cabinet shortly. Note: Preschool programs receiving new slot funds in SFY 08 that have been re-accredited under the new NAEYC standards would be exempt from the ECERS requirement for new slots.

Over the fall, the Goal One ECE Systems Working Group continued to meet to identify challenges *and* resolutions to those challenges concerning administration of the ECERS as well as to provide advice in the award of Quality Program Improvement Funds to preschool programs based on the ECERS results. Note: \$400,000 was allocated by the Cabinet in July 2007 for the ECERS and related assessment work, and \$500,000 was allocated for awards to providers related to the ECERS results for SFY 08. For SFY 09 funding allocation decisions, we hope to receive guidance from the evolving QRIS Plan development process, including a proposal for the new Quality Rating Scale.

To implement these recommendations and make the allocated funding available, Cabinet staff and leadership from Charter Oak State College developed a two-year MOU to manage both the ECERS process and to award funds to providers immediately afterwards. That MOU is now in place and the effort is moving forward. Shirley Adams of Charter Oak State College is the Project Manager for this initiative. As we have done with the public-private Building Local Capacity Initiative, there will also be a Collaborative Management Team to provide project guidance.

### **Quality Improvement at the Community Level**

In July 2007, the Cabinet also allocated \$400,000 for quality work at the community level in each year, SFY 08 and SFY 09. There is currently no plan for the specific use of these funds, although the Bureau of Early Childhood Education within SDE is developing a framework for ongoing professional development TA. This proposal is related to professional development on the CT Preschool Curriculum Benchmarks and the Preschool Assessment Framework.

Also, note that no funding was awarded to one of the Cabinet's top ten priorities -- development of a preschool consultation network -- a clear component of a Quality ECE System. There continues to be an ad hoc group of early

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<sup>2</sup> Online at -- [www.ecpolicycouncil.org/docs/Summary\\_report\\_w\\_apps.pdf](http://www.ecpolicycouncil.org/docs/Summary_report_w_apps.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Online at -- [www.ecpolicycouncil.org/docs/2007-9-10/JG\\_2nd\\_DraftJuly30Minutes.pdf](http://www.ecpolicycouncil.org/docs/2007-9-10/JG_2nd_DraftJuly30Minutes.pdf).

childhood professionals from the health, mental health and education sectors working on this, and we expect to hear back from them in the early spring on ideas they have to moving forward.

Additionally, there is a proposal on the Cabinet's table (on which consensus was reached at the last meeting) to co-invest with several CT foundations to look at policy and systems implications of a quality health "system" for young children.

Please note that we are in discussion with the Office for Policy and Management about rolling unspent Cabinet funds forward into SFY 09, and that the Cabinet will discuss an evolving set of by-laws that will assist us in receiving and evaluating requests for additional funds allocation. You can find the 2nd draft of proposed Cabinet by-laws at -- [www.ecpolicycouncil.org/docs/2008-1-14/Proposed\\_Cabinet\\_ByLaws.pdf](http://www.ecpolicycouncil.org/docs/2008-1-14/Proposed_Cabinet_ByLaws.pdf)

### **Relation of Quality Improvement Work Other Ongoing Cabinet and Council Efforts**

*Cabinet Standing Committee on Accountability.* The Cabinet will establish a set of standing committees, one of which will be the Standing Committee on Accountability. We are required to develop and submit a formal *Accountability Plan* to the Connecticut General Assembly not later than December 2008, based on an RBA framework, with population outcomes as well as systems and program measures. As you know, we are hard at work on the Cabinet's 2008 RBA presentation, to be delivered to the CGA Appropriations Committee on the morning of February 7th.

We expect the Standing Committee on Accountability to engage several inter-connected working groups: (a) Accountability Plan development; (b) Data issues; (c) Quality Improvement. We will immediately link the Cabinet's Quality Improvement working group (likely to be responsible for collective management of existing quality funds use) with the Council's QRIS development working group. Once the Cabinet has adopted the proposed QRIS Plan and Scale, the Council's group will be disbanded, and implementation work will be done within the Cabinet's Standing Committee on Accountability.

*Early Childhood Research Network.* With leadership from Dr. Schechter, we are moving ahead through the Joint Chairs of the Cabinet and Council to propose a working agreement across institutions of higher education for development of the proposed Early Childhood Research and Policy Institute (in shorthand, "the research network"). A framework for this institute was provided within the Early Childhood Investment Plan. Once established, this effort must be linked with and have a role in the whole "quality improvement" process, as there are many areas in which knowledge development and dissemination continues to be needed.

*Cabinet Data Matters Work.* Another plank in this evolving accountability, quality and management platform concerns data collection, access, analysis and reporting. On the Data Registry side of the work, a MOU is in place between the Cabinet and the CT Community College System to support the continued development of the ECE workforce registry. Cabinet funds in the amount of \$100,000 for each of SFY 08 and SFY 09 have already been allocated. There is a wonderful working group, facilitated by Bennett Pudlin of the Charter Oak Group, that has led this work to date. At this point, we already have data on some 2500 ECE teachers (thanks to DSS and the DSS Centers) in the system.

In addition, there will be a Data Matters working group within the Standing Committee on Accountability and funds have been allocated (\$200,000 in each year) to advance key data interoperability, collection and analyses issues. This work will be coordinated with ongoing work by the Department of Social Services (Bureau of Rehabilitation Services), Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and the Office for Workforce Competitiveness, utilizing the services of the Public Consulting Group of Boston, Mass. An update meeting for Commissioners is being provided later in January.