

# **Request for Cabinet Funds: Early Childhood Consultation System Development**

## **Background**

The Early Childhood Education Cabinet identified the provision of health, mental health, and education consultation to preschool programs in Connecticut as one of its top 10 action priorities for SFY 07-08. The purpose of this consultation is to enhance the skills of directors and teachers for meeting the comprehensive needs of children in their programs.

As one of the top 10 priorities, this action item was transmitted to the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council to be included as within the Early Childhood Investment Plan, Part I (November 2006). The Council developed a proposal for establishment of an "interdisciplinary consultation network to bring coordinated support of specialists from several key fields to early learning settings serving children age's birth to age eight." (Investment Plan, 2006. p. 31)

The Council also specified required components of the consultation network, including:

- A designated centralized leadership and coordination infrastructure with statutory responsibility to organize and implement a system
- Specification of the frequency, duration and expected outcomes of the consultant activities in early childhood settings
- A centralized database for information on available consultants
- Training for health, education, mental health and social services consultants that ensures a consistent knowledge base aligned with best practices, state early learning guidelines, and state goals for children
- Ongoing professional development from Network consultants within and across disciplines
- Fiscal resources to support the operation of the Network and the use of consultants within early childhood programs, and
- A method of public accountability for child and system results (Investment Plan, p 31)

The Investment Plan envisioned a fiscal commitment of \$287,000 in SFY 08 and \$323,000 in SFY 09. This action item was not included in the Biennial Budget passed for this period.

## **Cabinet Budget Request**

\$ 39,500 is requested in Cabinet funds in SFY 08 and half of SFY 09 to begin to plan for and implement the consultation network envisioned in the Early Childhood Investment Plan. This funding will be matched by more than \$60,000 in additional funding already committed to accomplish these next steps – a plan for the network and some immediate consultation infrastructure improvements – by December 31, 2008.

## **Relation to Current Cabinet and Council Work**

Two current efforts of the Cabinet relate directly to the interdisciplinary consultation strategy:

1. **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Planning.** A support strategy for practitioners and providers that is modeled on consultation will be a key element of the QRIS plan that is scheduled for adoption in December 2008.

2. **Data Matters Working Group** (Accountability Committee). Among other tasks, the Work Group will address the new Early Childhood Professional Registry and the need to incorporate consultants into that database. The work on the Registry will intersect with the QRIS as the state measures the quality of ECE programs, including the qualifications of teaching staff and then attempts to support programs wishing to improve. A pool of trained consultants is needed to effect change and the Registry is the logical repository of information on consultants. The Registry will also assist the Department of Public Health to promote compliance with licensing regulations that require consultants to programs. The Registry as a database of consultants will also support the information and referral function of 211 Child Care.

## **Next Steps**

Over the coming year, a working group associated with the Cabinet will

1. Assess and build the necessary consultation infrastructure during the current biennium including:
  - Developing solid networks for health, mental health and education consultants: identification, communication, information sharing, support
  - Interdisciplinary consultation conference and outreach
  - Developing standards for consultation: code of ethics, competencies, qualifications, best practices
  - Evaluation of current training within disciplines and across disciplines
  - Developing module in the Professional Registry to identify consultants, verify their qualifications, provide referral information and support the networks
  - Connecting consultation to quality measurement and improvement efforts with relevance to consultation, such as QRIS, Accreditation Facilitation Project, environmental rating and others.
2. Develop a plan for the envisioned consultation system to guide upcoming biennial budget discussions.

## **Leadership for Interdisciplinary Consultation System Development**

An ad hoc workgroup of state agencies, consultation managers and proponents of interdisciplinary consultation has been meeting to design a delivery model that would fit the Cabinet's goals and current priorities. A Collaborative Management Team is forming with representation from health, mental health and education disciplines and the interdisciplinary perspective. A reconstituted workgroup will then be used to develop short and long-term infrastructure initiatives and a plan for integrating consultation into the early childhood system.

Each of the three major disciplines (health, education and mental health) will develop an agenda of efforts to improve their support of consultants (e.g. networking, training, standards). The Connecticut Nurses Association (CNA) will lead the health consultation work. The Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC) will coordinate the education consultation efforts. The Department of Children and Families will have leadership on mental health consultation. Resources are proposed for this discipline-specific planning and implementation work and for representation on the collaborative Leadership Team.

The Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI) will continue to coordinate and support these discipline-specific efforts. CHDI will also engage state agency leaders and provide leadership for the interdisciplinary work including the Registry development with Connecticut Charts-A-Course (CCAC), integration with QRIS and the development of a plan for delivering consultation. ECE providers and consultants and other stakeholders will be included through various means of outreach including work

groups, focus groups, a conference and on-line feedback to queries and proposals. The following budget builds on existing resources.

**Budget April 2008 - December, 2008**

<b>EXPENSES</b>		<b>FUNDING SOURCE</b>	
Health Consultation Coordination and Leadership (CNA/Kim Sandor)	15,000	5,500 2,000 <b>7,500</b>	CHDI grant to CNA Portion of DPH grant to CNA <b>Cabinet Funding</b>
Education Consultation Coordination and Leadership (CAEYC)	15,000	<b>15,000</b>	<b>Cabinet Funding</b>
Mental Health Consultation Coordination and Leadership (DCF/Kathy Bradley)	15,000	10,000 <b>5,000</b>	Portion of DCF contract with ABH or in-kind staff? <b>Cabinet Funding</b>
Interdisciplinary Consultation Coordination and Leadership (CHDI/Judith Meyers and Sue Wilson) (More \$ needed for facilitation or consultant?)	20,000	20,000	CHDI contract with Sue Wilson
Outreach/Conference (CHDI)	12,000	<b>12,000</b>	<b>Cabinet Funding</b>
Registry Development (CCAC)	13,500	3,500 10,000	CCAC Programming Funds CCAC contract with Sue Wilson
Plan development (CHDI)	10,000	10,000	CHDI contract with Sue Wilson
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,500</b>	<b>100,500</b>	
<b>Cabinet Request</b>		<b>39,500</b>	