

EARLY LEARNING COALITION OF SARASOTA COUNTY  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

School Board of Sarasota County, Brown Awning Building, Rooms A-B  
The Landings, 1960 Landings Boulevard, Sarasota  
21 February 2008  
MINUTES

**1. ATTENDANCE.**

a. Voting Members Present:

Laura Benson	Mike Breton	
Jill Jacoby	David Hicks	Janice Mee
Lois Natiello	Laura Bauman	Tami Conetta

b. Non-Voting Members Present:

Dr. Norman Goldstein	Sue Loncaric	Hope Kinney
Ken Modelewski		

c. Absent (Voting):

Steve Spangler	Chris Kofler	Kathryn Stuckey
Bill Little	Pauline Tracy	

d. Absent (Non-Voting):

Lori White

e. Staff:

Janet Kahn	Erin Lawrence	Linda Mason
James Pawlak	Dianne Rose	Mary Wolf
Marjoria Fondacaro		

f. Visitors:

Randee Tolbert	Jackie Fountaine	Jennifer Ourednik
Linda Parsche		

**2. CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME GUESTS**

Chair, Laura Benson, called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

**3. CONSENT AGENDA.**

Approval of Minutes was postponed, as a quorum was not reached until later in the meeting.

**4. CHAIR REPORT.**

Laura announced that she has now been officially appointed as the official chair of the ELC Board. David Hicks was reappointed by the Governor to his private sector seat.

Governors Summit Report

Laura briefly reported on the Governor's Early Childhood Summit held last month in Orlando. There was discussion about the economic impact of child care, discussion and debate as to the role of public funds to support child care. Regional meetings occurred in the afternoon of the first day. The second day focused on financing issues related to child care. There was a panel discussion with various representatives from other states discussing how at the statewide level initiatives were enacted to provide systematic support for child care.

Century Commission

Laura also reported on her role as a member of the Century Commission, charged with examining statewide issues impacting the future of the state. There has been a lot of attention and discussion on environmental concerns. Laura is involved in looking at educational issues and will be looking at

the continuum of education from preschool through the university level. He feels her role on the ELC Board will be helpful in framing this discussion.

## 5. PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION.

### a. Power Point overview of the "Look for the Stars" program

Janet showed the power point that is currently being used during information meetings with providers. It has some level of details as to the specific domains and point system. There is an alternative power point that is shorter and can be used for other community presentations or for different audiences

The power point reviewed the key goals of QRIS, history at the state level as well as local efforts. Discussed a QRIS as being important tool to support parent choice and help drive the demand for quality. The power point includes a description of the supports and incentives that are needed for sites to achieve and maintain high quality learning environments, and described the various domains being assessed and the point system.

The local Child Care Council endorsed the concept of QRIS to be able to track, monitor, show outcomes. Goal is to raise level of care above what licensing requires; licensing does not guarantee quality of center. The learning environment is assessed using an ERS-Environmental Rating scale for the appropriate age group. Even though the ERS are costly to administer, everyone agrees that it is important to use a research-based, reliable tool. The learning environment also looks at the ratios and group size, curriculum and child assessment. Staff qualifications are evaluated as well as family involvement and business practices. There has been a lot of debate about qualifications of teachers at state level. The issue of appropriate wages for corresponding higher education is a critical factor

We have currently contracted with Devereux Florida – they have brought in an 8-person team. Visits will be unannounced. Janet reiterated that our community has been working for the last 4 years to help providers prepare them to recognize and improve quality. There have been financial investments (i.e. Gold Seal accreditation project) and ELC mentoring services to assist providers. Message to providers: these elements are those that should be in place in their centers or should currently be being worked on; there should not be any surprises as to the criteria by which sites are rated.

Calculating STAR rating: all categories are weighted according to the correlation, shown by research, of the respective areas to children's development. Points are added together to determine the rating. Three stars will be considered good quality. Goal is to no longer have 1 and 2 star sites after initial rating, within 15 months. Accreditation is also important and will be designated by a plus mark. Extra bonus points may be given to teacher education and professional development program, and commitment to serving challenging children.

Sites with ratings of 1-3 will be eligible for mini-grants, mentoring, etc. Sites with ratings of 4 and 5 are eligible for sustaining payments, which will be tied to establishing minimum wages for qualified teachers. All sites will be eligible for scholarship dollars so that teachers may go back to school. Education of parents and community regarding the STAR ratings is paramount.

Questions/discussion:

Ken asked about the value of a 5 star system if the expectation is that all sites become at least a 3. He also asked what will happen in 3 years with the sustaining payments. If the sustaining payments are used for wage enhancements then what will happen at the end of the 3 year project. Janet commented that the QCC wanted all children to be in high quality early learning environments, thus the expectation that the 1 star and 2 star sites become a 3 star within the 15 month timeframe. In terms of what happens after 3 years, for one thing the system as a whole should look different, there may be changes at the state level, and these are the type of discussions that need to occur within the sustainability task force.

Mike asked how many of the 250 total sites are participating and what percentage of those sites currently accept state funds (SR or VPK). Janet commented that there are about 140 total sites in the initial group: 98 centers and the rest, about 40 family child care homes.

Tami asked what safeguards were built into system to ensure that the participating sites still accept SR scholarship children. She is concerned that once a program achieves a 5, parents flock to those sites and then they're too full to accept scholarship kids. To have a STAR rating, do you have to have children on scholarships? Tami stated that with the Gold Seal program, some sites no longer served those children most in need.

Janet stated that the QRIS is an all-inclusive system and is open to any site, but the sustaining payments and other benefits are tied to the site's acceptance of scholarship kids, and a commitment to "give back" in some way. This was never a requirement for the sites who received assistance from the Gold Seal project.

Tami asked if we were using some of our ELC funds for the program. Janet reminded the Board that a portion of our quality dollars are specifically allocated toward the funding for the QRIS, and serves as a portion of the required "matching" funds in order to receive the GCCFV funds.

Laura commented that if we start to see the Gold Seal phenomenon happen again, we will evaluate it and determine how to address it at the time.

Mike commented on there being a fee charged to private programs for program administration? If sites that take scholarship kids receive discounts, wouldn't that continually encourage sites to take our scholarship kids? Janet commented that this is a good discussion issue for QCC meeting, how to encourage the private sites to participate, while covering the costs of administering the assessments, etc.

Lois commented that this is a great starting place to add professionalism to local industry.

The question was asked about how the sustaining dollars will be provided to the family homes. Janet commented that many of the other systems within the state do not include the family homes. Our system does not exclude FCCH's. The benefits will need to be tailored the homes and the sustaining funds pro-rated.

There was some discussion as to the need for there to be increased state support for early childhood programs in order to sustain quality. Janet commented that early education is the only educational entity that doesn't have large scale public investment to sustain the infrastructure, and there are other states that do invest in child care at the state level, with all of the elements of a QRIS, including sustaining dollars. Tami commented that the state does invest in the financial assistance that parents receive, much like tuition assistance at the college level. Janet commented that early care needs a similar level of public investment as the K-12 system.

Laura stated that there is a school of thought that early education is now a public function. To what extent does 0 to 5, which is early nurturing time in families for a lot of people, does the line of public schooling for those kids start? Laura then commented that this was a much larger discussion for another meeting as there are many opinions on this issue.

Janet then passed out the QRIS chart for centers that illustrates the required elements, and the point spread within each domain.

*b. Review of ELC committees (as requested) and interface with other early childhood entities*

Janet reviewed the handout that had been distributed on the Coalition's committees, the QCC, and the ELC interface with numerous other early childhood entities in the community. The

Coalition only has one standing committee of the Board: the Budget and Finance Committee that meets monthly. The other committees meet as needed: Governance Committee and Communications/Outreach committee. The staff run program committee, the Professional Development, Training and Quality committee, still meets monthly. There are numerous community committees related to early childhood efforts that almost all of the Board members currently attend or serve on at least one of them. Board members are welcome to come to any of these meetings. Laura asked the Board members to review the various committees and community meetings for possible involvement.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Randee Tolbert commented on the QRIS and stated that although there is some anxiety among providers, the family child care providers are supportive of the efforts to improve quality at a community level and the professionalism of the project.

### **6. OLD BUSINESS.**

#### **a. VPK**

Janet provided an update on VPK and the preliminary readiness rates. The rate of 210-211 is the rate expected to be considered a low performing provider. There may be 9-12 low performers in our county. The final results are to be issued soon.

Enrollment for Fall VPK is scheduled to begin March 18<sup>th</sup>. Families are already calling requesting information.

#### **b. Report to the Community**

The ELC Report to Community is being finalized. The communications committee will then meet to determine the community meeting and the distribution efforts. Tami asked if Cheray was going to be a part of that process and Janet confirmed that she would be.

### **7. DISCUSSION ITEMS.**

#### **a. Finance & Utilization Update**

James reviewed the charts that had been updated since the last meeting. All costs are within the earmarks. We do now have to close intake as the number in children in care has come up to a high for the year. We do need to work down with expected normal monthly attrition.

Janet mentioned that since July we have taken in 900 children. Mike Breton commented that there is: tremendous volatility in amount of kids entering and leaving system. Janet stated that this is the nature of the SR program. Each year is different and unpredictable.

Laura called for questions.

Tami asked how are we for the year as to budget overall? Janet repeated that if we have normal attrition, then we will be fine, we've stopped intake now. But we do have to watch the SR budget very closely. The VPK budget is on track. Tami stated that she was amazed how much VPK numbers have gone up since the first year of 1100 to over 1600 this year. Several members commented that this was good since the results have validated that even minimum exposure to VPK is valuable.

#### **b. Professional Development Community Plan (Palm Bch County)-implications for our local system**

Janet just briefly mentioned that this was a topic that she would like to share more in depth with the Board in a future meeting. She attended a presentation on the system currently in place in Palm Beach for the last 5 years, and feels that we can implement the model locally. The program is focused on the development of core competencies, and all efforts, those of training, mentoring, continuing education, etc are all focused around these defined core competencies. This provides a very powerful and defined community wide framework in which to see and

measure outcomes related to teacher and director professional growth, with very specified outcomes within the individual classrooms and sites overall. The system fits well within the improvement plans that will emerge from the baseline assessments of the QRIS.

**8. ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

- a. Next Board meeting will be on 19 March.

**9. ADJOURNMENT.**

Laura: Closing of the evening will always be whether or not info received was valuable to you. Did we do work that is consistent to our mission and focus? The board agreed that the discussion tonight was valuable and consistent with our mission.

Laura also commented that she would like us to post goals for the year in our meetings so we can consistently reflect back on those.

Meeting adjourned at 7:13pm

Laura Benson, Chair