

NIH Child Care Board Meeting Minutes
March 12, 2020
Building 45, Room D

Members and Liaisons in Attendance: Dr. Theresa Cruz, Dr. Kristin Dupre, Dr. Chao Jiang, Ms. Olivia Kent, Mr. Daniel Lonnerdal, Dr. Seema Nayak, Dr. Suzanne Ryan, Dr. Blake Warner, Ms. Kate Winseck, Dr. Richard Wyatt, Ms. Heather Rogers, Ms. Julie Margel, Ms. Christina Segura, Ms. Anne Schmitz, Ms. Barbara Acquaviva, Ms. Eva Chen, Mr. Ed Kang, Mr. Ivan Locke, Dr. Melissa Conti Mazza, Dr. Pragya Prakash, Ms. Susan Cook, Ms. Tonya Lee, Ms. Linda Owen, Ms. Agustina Boswell, Ms. Michelle Coley, Ms. Megan Crum, Mr. Chris Gaines, Ms. Chantal Gerrard, Dr. Heather Narver, Ms. Mary Nguyen, Ms. Melissa Porter, Mr. Timothy Tosten, Dr. Judith Walters

- I. **Welcome and Introduction of Board Members, Liaisons and Guests** - Chair Theresa Cruz called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

- II. **Updates:**
 - A. **Approval of January 2020 Minutes** – A motion was made, seconded, and approved by all.
 - B. **Update on NIH Child Care Use Agreements** – Ms. Susan Cook announced that all three of the NIH Child Care Use Agreements have been fully executed. Dr. Richard Wyatt inquired about language in the agreements and Ms. Cook assured the Board that the Use Agreements address transition of a childcare operator.
 - C. **NCI Child Care Feasibility** – Ms. Tonya Lee reported on her meeting with Leidos Biomedical and the efforts of the ORS staff to continue to work with NCI Frederick on the outcomes of their childcare feasibility study.
 - D. **Back-up Care Contract** – Ms. Susan Cook reported that the contract package has been sent to OLAO by ORS, and in her meeting today with OLAO hopes to receive an update on extension of the contract. Dr. Seema Nayak inquired about increased need and utilization of the back-up care program in light of the COVID-19 crisis. Ms. Tonya Lee reported that Bright Horizons is advising customers to access the service via the mobile app for faster service. Ms. Lee reminded the Board that the ORS Childcare Resource and Referral Service through LifeWork Strategies is also available to the entire NIH workforce. A brief discussion followed regarding the possibility of adding uses to the back-up care contract with Bright Horizons if contract capacity is reached. Additional funding would be required. Ms. Cook replied that detailed information has been presented to Mr. Timothy Tosten and Ms. Colleen McGowan.
 - E. **Update on NWCCC NAEYC** – Northwest Childcare Center’s NAEYC Application for Candidacy was submitted on February 28. They are now awaiting their 24-hour notice of the validation visit, which can occur anytime between March 11 and September 11, 2020.

- III. **Membership Committee Report** – Co-chair Dan Lonnerdal reported there will be 3 vacancies; recruitment is underway through global email; deadline is March 23. Interviews of final candidates will be completed in April; new appointees will attend the May Child Care Board meeting. Dr. Wyatt inquired about an OIR Liaison and other liaison positions; a brief discussion of FelCom representation followed. It was recommended that the Board reach out to OITE for a liaison representative. The information presented by Mr. Lonnerdal is included in the attached PowerPoint slides.

IV. Subsidy Committee Report – Dr. Chao Jiang announced that Dr. Blake Warner will assume co-chair responsibilities, and she thanked the hardworking committee members. Dr. Jiang reported on the progress on the committee’s Work Plan to evaluate program utilization and to disseminate new outreach materials. Increases in the total adjusted household income thresholds and corresponding subsidy percentages for eligible federal employees have not resulted in an increase in utilization of the program. The 2019 utilization numbers show a decrease over the past 4 years. The recent decline seems to be a result of participants surpassing the income thresholds. The majority of participants have school age children. Ms. Kate Winseck suggested highlighting that children age 13 are eligible for participation; the Communications Committee will include that information in their upcoming global email. Future efforts: attract more participants with print materials and getting information to the Nursing Mothers Program as well as to OHR (for distribution to federal employees qualifying for paternity leave). Dr. Richard Wyatt asked about the financial assistance available to trainees through the NIH-sponsored childcare centers. ECDC employs a sliding scale for families enrolled at the center; POPI matches what is offered by FEEA and 100% of participants in their program are trainees.

In addition, Chair Theresa Cruz suggested endorsing the idea of moving money from the Subsidy contract to the Back-up Care contract to meet the needs of NIH federal employees during the COVID-19 crisis. Ms. Susan Cook acknowledged that ORS is looking at alternative scenarios. All agreed that efforts need to continue to promote the Subsidy program and encourage increased use. The information presented by Dr. Jiang is included in the attached PowerPoint slides.

V. Innovative Programs Committee – Co-chair Kristin Dupre reported that part of the committee’s work plan is to transition the trainee subsidy program issue to the intramural scientific community by engaging Dr. Michael Gottesman, Deputy Director for Intramural Research. The Innovative Programs Committee decided it was prudent to engage with the NIH Office of the General Counsel first. Under the leadership of co-chair Dan Fogarty, a list of questions was drafted and sent to OGC. The task has been assigned to a specific individual, who will report back to Mr. Fogarty. Chair Theresa Cruz reminded the Board that no consensus has yet been reached on how to address this issue. She emphasized that the committee members need to be clear on what is being asked for in any letter or meeting and reiterated that OGC needs to be consulted on each issue. After getting those answers, the committee co-chairs will engage with Dr. Gottesman. Mr. Timothy Tosten asked about an FAES funding stream for a trainee program, and a brief discussion of past efforts with FAES followed.

VI. Wait List Committee Report – Dr. Theresa Cruz thanked her co-chair, Ms. Heather Rogers and all the hard-working committee members. The committee met on February 21 to review the Wait List data and report on trends and examine the impact to policy changes. As of December 31, 2019, there are 738 unique children on the Wait List (over 300 less than pre-NWCCC); this number has been broken down into the number of children waiting for immediate enrollment by center. The purpose is to try to get a better gauge of need, instead of preference. Dr. Richard Wyatt suggested that the entire wait list of 738 children represents “an interest list,” as opposed to an immediate enrollment list.

A discussion of the new consolidated Decline Policy followed. The new policy includes a first decline, which puts the child at the bottom of all the center waitlists, i.e., at the “back of the line.” The second decline, aka “out of the line,” removes the child from all the center waitlists and requires that the parent must opt in and re-enroll the child on the Wait List, if so desired. All parents on the NIH Wait List have been notified of the new policy by email by the Wait List Administrator. In addition, a recent global email about the low number of preschoolers on the Wait List included information on the new consolidated Decline Policy. It was suggested that some language on the Child and Family Programs webpage be changed.

The question was posed: What happens to childcare access when an employee or trainee separates from the NIH? The NIH Use Agreements state that parents have 60 days to disenroll when they separate from NIH. Exceptions can be granted, especially in the case of Trainees/Fellows who are converting to federal employee status. The policy allows NIH childcare to remain a recruitment and retention tool.

Discussion of Summer 2020 Enrollment with Childcare Directors:

Concern has been raised that currently there are not enough preschool age children on the NIH Wait List to fill the anticipated summer/fall openings in the three NIH sponsored childcare centers. The suggested enrollment plan -- for preschool children only (not including their siblings -- includes (1) reaching out to families currently on the NIH Wait List to alert them to possible enrollment offers, (2) advertising to the NIH community, targeting newly hired Trainees/Fellows, (3) possibly offering enrollment to families on the “Other Feds” waiting list, and (4) possibly opening the Wait List to NIH contractors. The requirement to maintain an enrollment of at least 50% of federal employees’ children was reiterated.

The NIH childcare center directors supported the need for an enrollment plan that targets preschoolers. All three NIH sponsored childcare centers have a large number of spaces to fill for the summer/fall. Preschoolers’ enrollment/tuition is needed to offset the costs of infants and toddlers as it is more costly to provide care for infants and toddlers. The center directors stressed that it is imperative that they reach and maintain full enrollment in order to be financially solvent. Affordability and quality will be impacted if they cannot fill preschool spaces.

In summary, the overall waitlist numbers continue to decrease even though the demand for infant care continues to be high. The new decline policy goes into effect on March 1; its impact will be tracked and reported to the Board. The Board will also be apprised of the results of the global email sent about the need for preschoolers on the wait list. Planning for the future needs to consider (1) re-tooling the present facilities to meet the demands of infant care and the loss of preschoolers and (2) preparing the NIH workforce for tuition increases to meet demographic changes.

The information presented by Dr. Cruz is included in the attached PowerPoint slides.

VII. COVID-19 Impact on Childcare – Ms. Susan Cook reported on the NIH Tier I Employee Child Care Resources Plan:

- The childcare centers are licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care Licensing.

- The MSDE Superintendent has issued a statement that OCC-Licensing will follow guidance from the Maryland Department of Health and the Maryland Emergency Management Agency.
- At this time, neither MSDE OCC-Licensing nor Montgomery County Public Schools has announced plans to close schools and/or licensed childcare centers.
- The NIH sponsored childcare centers will follow the directive of MSDE, not MCPS.
- All three of the NIH sponsored childcare centers plan to continue regular program operations until advised otherwise.
- Each of the three centers has developed an Emergency Operations Plan that includes details on communications and continuity of business and program operations. If, and when, emergency plans need to be implemented, communication with the families and staff will be immediate and comprehensive.

In the meantime:

- To prevent the spread of illness, they will continue to implement the MSDE-OCC Licensing Guidelines for Cleaning and Sanitizing as well as their Health and Safety Protocols which are already part of their daily routines.
- Additionally, they have enhanced their cleaning and hygiene practices as an added measure of protection for children, families, and staff.
- Parents/guardians/staff members/NIH support staff entering the childcare centers (ORF, cleaners, pest management, etc.) are encouraged to:
 1. Practice good hygiene. Everyone entering the childcare centers are required to wash their hands upon entering.
 2. Do not enter the childcare center if feeling ill.
 3. Self-isolation/quarantine, is necessary.
 - a. Center directors are asking families and staff to notify the center director if anyone in their household has been exposed to someone suspected to have coronavirus or has traveled to a location known to have a community spread of the virus. Self-isolation/quarantine for 14 days may be required.

VIII. Announcements and Adjournment

- Reminder to encourage qualified and interested co-workers to apply for membership to the NIH Child Care Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

The next Board meeting will be held on April 16, 2020 in Building 45, Room D.