

# Alaska Early Childhood Joint Task Force

January 27, 2020 – 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Southcentral Foundation – Anchorage, Alaska

## Meeting Summary

### **PARTICIPANTS**

*In-person:* Tamar Ben-Josef (AAPP), Stephanie Bergland (thread), Janis Braden (CCPO), Betsy Brenneman (AAPP), Stacy Collier (CCPO), Lindsey Earnest – (SCF), Maureen Harwood (SDS), Abbe Hensley (Best Beginnings), Christina Hulquist (CCPO), Jimael Johnson (AMHTA), Meghan Johnson (thread), Panu Lucier (thread), Shirley Pittz (Private Consultant), Brenda Porter (SCF), Ira Slomski–Pritz (Anchorage Mayor’s Office), Christie Reinhardt (WCFH).

*Teleconference:* Supanika Ackerman (DEED), Debbie Baldwin (RuralCap), Allison Gotlikch (Parent/Public Health Nurse), Matt Hirshfeld (ANMC), Kristin Spencer (DEED).

*Facilitation team:* Denali Daniels, Britta Hamre and Elizabeth Shea (DDA)

### **Recap of process to date/ Framework Overview**

Since the November 6, 2019 Joint Task Force (JTF) meeting, the following activities have taken place:

- PDG project extension was granted.
- Stakeholder meetings were held with AASB, Kodiak, Kindergarten Ready Network.
- JTF survey about plan framework was conducted.
- DRAFT plan framework has been developed, with three workgroups convening and providing further input.

### **Plan Framework Discussion:**

The plan framework and terminology were reviewed in detail. Input from the JTF on the framework was requested, with the intention that this framework would proceed. The question of “leads” was raised, and how the plan might address those actions that do not have leads. It was agreed that in order for a lead organization or department to be accountable, there needs to be buy-in and commitment. It was suggested that the plan needs to be written with audience in mind. Concerns were raised that before leads can be named, the infrastructure/governance portion of the plan may need to be developed.

### **Ten Year North Star Vision:**

In follow up to October and November JTF meetings, the focus turned to what the plan vision should be. Three groups each worked to draft a set of vision statements to reflect the plan. The following notes reflect this input and will be considered as a vision statement is further developed:

- Who is the plan for – whose voice should be in it? (broad, accessible)
- What will make it happen? Families? Policymakers?
  - o We want to make change
  - o A guiding star state
  - o A place where parents are proud to raise their children and have access to resources
- Vision-----→ 2030 High Quality Early Learning
- 20230 Vision – A state where:
  - o Every child – fulfilled, valued, respected
  - o Voices heard and acted on
  - o resilience
- Governance structure in place coordinates/integrates agency/government/provider actions.
- Children & families prioritized – guides policymaking at all levels.
- Children & family outcomes (Healthy K readiness, etc.) continuously and measurably improving,
- AK children & families have access to programs, services, and supports that are culturally relevant, respectful of language and traditional knowledge, regardless of geography, race, ethnicity, and income.
- Early Childhood is the foundation for a successful life. (policies, decisions, planning, etc. should reflect this belief, value, commitment.)
- Knowledge & understanding of EC is reflected in all aspects of State planning and implementation.
- State plan starts with early childhood and our youngest Alaskans.

***This activity was followed with a full group discussion including the following topics:***

- Whose vision is it? For the system or for the families? Is it a vision that will guide policymakers?
- The vision statement should be written for the families in our state, they are the center focus for the agencies that provide supports and services to our families
- IDEAS:
  - o A place where parents are proud to raise their children and have all the resources they need to do so.
  - o Alaska has high quality early learning experiences and supports families; families and children know how to access what they need.
- The vision for the plan should be FUNDAMENTALLY BIG
- Early childhood is the foundation for a successful life. The policies, decisions, and planning reflect this belief and value.

- The goals and activities we've been talking about so far don't directly reflect this vision.
- The title should say early childhood "GUIDING STAR"
- "Alaska's Early Childhood Ten Year Vision"
- Also viewed this question as: "if I left the state, came back in 10 years what would we want to see?"

### **Guiding Principles Discussion**

The agenda was then focused on draft guiding principles. A set of guiding principles which was developed based on input from the October and November JTF meetings, was shared for input.

The following discussion points followed:

- When the Alaska Mental Health Trust did their plan, they agreed that evidence-based is good, but also needs to allow room for other types of knowledge – one that are maybe not supported by evidence (yet.)
- Plan needs to be geographically-informed – needs to make sure there is a distinction between rural and urban.
- It was asked whether these principles were developed and guiding the work in the workgroups, and was indicated that they had not yet been developed before the workgroups convened, and noted this could have been helpful in hindsight.
- The guiding principles need to reflect something about trying to make things better – action-forward, we want things to change.
- Principles need to connect to advocacy and have a principle reflecting this.
- Need to add something about the concept and importance of "play" as in the Ireland plan. "Play is a right, a key learning pathway in the life of a child." The discussion about including play and where in the plan it should be included continued however was not resolved.
- In order to make the plan and principles relevant to everyone, we should be Including tribes in the planning process – giving them more ownership over the plan, not just through stakeholder meetings, but at the basic fundamental level. Suggestion to look at other statewide strategic plans and the process they implemented during the planning process.
- Team has heard people talk about the "whole-child" approach out in rural Alaska, Alaska should use the "whole-child" focus throughout the plan.
- "No wrong door" approach, we should be thinking more holistically about early childhood.
- Underneath the "family-centered" principle, we need to explicitly recognize that the family is the first teacher; this is already ingrained in Alaska Native culture. Maybe change principle to something like: "The family is the first and most important teacher, and Alaska's children and families are the highest priority."

- The intent of the document is to guide policy and funding, so maybe something that includes the intent of the plan should be made into a guiding principle.
- Throughout the plan we should say “evidence -informed” rather than “evidence - based,” this is not as narrow in definition.

### **Workgroup Recap/Updates**

The following updates and next steps were provided regarding the workgroup activity:

- There has been a lot of feedback from the workgroup briefing papers, discussions, and follow-up. This will now be recorded, organized and integrated to honor all of the work everyone has done.
- In WG1 – Children and Families are Healthy, Safe and Stable - the group talked a lot about process. Ultimately, at the end of the meeting the consensus was to use the strengthening families approach as a resource. There are recommended elements in this workgroup pointing to the Oregon State plan whereas possible other plan documents are referenced as being aligned with the early childhood plan. It was noted that much in this Goal Area has nothing to do with early childhood education (things like health & immunizations). Many like that those in system are referred to as professionals, but we need to make sure the term covers all.
- WG2 – Alaska’s Children have Quality Early Learning Experiences – this group had a productive session providing input on the 6 objective statements and supporting actions, and met via teleconference afterward, plus provided input via email on wordsmithing.
- WG3 – Infrastructure. This group had just met this morning, and a recap was shared with the JTF. There was discussion about whether facilities belonged under WG2. A more thorough recap of the governance discussion followed. There was a recommendation to establish a committee, with technical assistance support, to explore the governance options and determine the best path forward. The JTF agreed to this path forward, noting that the strategic plan would include a reference of this plan of action and that the process would be complete by October 2020.

### **Outstanding Issues:**

- There is an assumption that the governance structure needs to come before everything else, nothing else can happen until this is done.
- Terminology: do we use national recommendation? “Early Childhood Education Programs/Professional.” This doesn’t include the word “care,” we want to elevate the profession and care is associated with babysitting and daycare.
- The plan should be family-centered, but it is written for system people and they are the audience. It was agreed that the plan is for the system.

- Some don't like the word "educators" because parents won't like this.
- A new objective was recommended: ADVOCACY.
- There was further process discussion about the planning process. Some thought it was a 3 phase process, first the needs assessment & strategic plan, then bring it toward the AECCC for approval or work. Others have different opinions on the progression of this work. The conversation on governance during the workgroup meeting did not assume that the AECCC was the highest form of governance.
- There was further general agreement that we will create a governance structure, and the plan we are developing now is what they will start with.
- Planning teams need to have a rigorous stakeholder engagement process and get a lot of buy-in, from businesses, groups, parents, etc.
- For the PDG grant, we get to choose what we want to spend the funding on, they have been flexible in allowing for states to meet their needs.

### **Stakeholder Engagement Planning:**

The strategic planning team will be traveling to rural Alaska and requested JTF feedback on what we should ask or gather from the communities while we are there. The structure of the visits is to have a facilitated meeting with the system/care/learning individual, and a community meeting of parents and all stakeholders. The JTF worked in breakout groups to provide draft input on questions to ask stakeholders:

- Focus on developing a system plan with input from tribes, parents and communities.
- Define the "system" for people in order to get feedback that is valuable.
- There was resistance to using "system" in title of plan, think about the audience. While we may not need it in the title we all understand. This isn't a plan for families, the end users are the system.
- What we can be asking families and stakeholders is "what would make the system better? How can the system support you better?"
- Asking about the system might still be confusing for people in the communities visited. Using the North star vision instead of system, "where do you need us to go?"
- We don't have a unified system, we are talking about "systems" that aren't coordinated and that aren't being successful. How can we better define, explain, and ask families/stakeholders about the "system."
- We are basically asking families "what do they need?" How do they want to interact with ECE programs and providers, what barriers need to come down, how would it be easier for you?
- In the past, we have been asking programs "what does success look like, and what are the barriers in front of you?" These questions are reflective and prompting.

**Conclusion**

The meeting concluded with reporting out on the stakeholder engagement input activity. The next steps will be for the stakeholder engagement, the workgroup input and the JTF survey to be fully reviewed in consideration of an updated draft plan document.