

## Early Learning Council- Public Awareness Committee

*Minutes for meeting held October 12, 2010*

### **Members Present**

Shannon Christian  
Sue Logan  
Janet Maruna  
Bonnie Roelle  
Joan Vitale, co-chair  
Kathy Villano, co-chair  
Christine Wilson

### **Members on the phone**

Barb Quinn  
Samir Tanna

### **Minutes taken by:**

Lissa Domoracki

### **The meeting convened at 10:00 a.m.**

*Agenda item: Revisit work plan and gather input from committee members.*

Major Discussion Points: Joan Vitale began the meeting with introductions of present committee members and those on the phone. Kathy Villano explained that the last few months were spent revisiting the ELC work plan, and there is much to be done. Ms. Villano turned her attention to the work plan in order to see which tasks have been accomplished. She summarized the mission of the PAC, emphasizing its initial goal of ensuring full participation in Preschool for All. Focusing on “Opportunities & Challenges” in the work plan, Ms. Villano listed the completed tasks. She stated there was no ISBE Bidders Conference/Request for Application for new funds this year, making that task irrelevant to the 2010 plan. Ms. Villano clarified that some tasks, such as advocacy, are better defined as on-hold, instead of ongoing.

*Agenda item: Discuss the role of the PAC providing input and support for public awareness on other Early Learning Council committee work plans.*

Major Discussion Points: Ms. Villano introduced Shannon Christian, who just joined the meeting. Ms. Christian describes her new position as Director of the Office of Early Childhood Development in the Office of the Governor. Through this committee, Ms. Christian hopes to

gain insight into strategic planning and website/ social media aspects of early learning organizations in Illinois.

Kathy Villano explained that there were print ads two years ago and Voices for Illinois Children has strong public awareness campaigns. Discussion ensued over the general public's confusion of options in early care and education (ie: child care vouchers, PFA, etc), and the need for a single go-to site or resource to help explain program options in geographic areas. Sue Logan described her personal experience with extreme budget cuts and the PreK for All grant. Working with low-income communities, many of the parents' top priorities are providing basic needs for their families. They do not focus on the type of early learning program in which their child is enrolled. Therefore, Sue believes these parents do not have a strong feeling toward PFA being offered for their children.

The discussion turned to ECERS-R and the response from the early care and education community. In some situations the feedback was negative as it forced programs to implement major changes. INCCRA needs a research-based instrument to support the QRS voucher enhancement program and ECERS-R is appropriate for this and so it was a logical choice for ISBE, but some people discussed needing to look at how to avoid having this instrument guide the class and the teaching. It is also an important instrument for implementation as there are some fiscal impacts for centers with vouchers.

Ms. Vitale explained that legislators are not remembering Preschool for All or emphasizing early learning needs. The ELC needs to keep sending out messages about the value of these programs. In all economic groups, parents do not know if their child is receiving any PFA time. Ms. Christian commented that from both a national and a state level, there are too many public programs to differentiate. Since Ms. Logan highlighted that parents attend recreational get-togethers and do not attend educational ones, she believes programs should adjust these recreational ones to have an educational component.

Ms. Vitale described the process in which Preschool for All began; taking scientific evidence on brain research, it was proven that a lot is occurring with a baby's brain in relation to his or her caregiver. This led to a brain research campaign, which Voices for Illinois Children led for five or six years. Unfortunately, while it educated young parents at the time, the information does not seem to continue to be passed down to new parents. Ms. Vitale confirmed that all of the names and titles of organizations are confusing to parents. Suggestions are made, such as using a star system, since the reality does not match the rhetoric of all the different programs. Ms. Christian emphasized that educating parents on what to look for in a program, without specifying various ones, is what children need. She described that ELC should pull together all groups, on a national level, with public campaign money and develop one message for everyone to send out.

*Agenda item: The role of the PAC with the new healthcare initiative.*

Major Discussion Points: Ms. Vitale described the connection between the healthcare initiative and the PAC. It was established that the child care provider's emphasis on survival and making payments over the type of program they offer mirrors the ideology of the parents. The parents'

main focus is survival, not the type of program offered. Ms. Christian recounted that there are federal dollars available for kids designing campaigns. Ms. Vitale added that if a community can own an idea and a campaign, it is most successful (ie: Decatur and Baby Talk).

A discussion followed about collaborating with other groups and creating an online resource for parents and providers. Ms. Christian suggested an interactive map that people from all over the country can use to find early learning resources. She will look into this idea, as it will be difficult to decide what website to use while remaining neutral.

The committee explored the use and effectiveness of public awareness campaigns. Ms. Vitale stated that everything this group has implemented has been focus group tested. The most effective method of messaging is to say what the audience is open to hearing; different messages are appropriate for different audiences.

*Agenda item: Next Steps.*

Major Discussion Points: As the meeting time came to an end, the committee discussed what steps to take next. Ms. Vitale stated the PAC needs to help parents, providers and educators understand child development. In order to do this, Ms. Christian suggested that the committee should outline questions for the strategic planning meeting. The committee should take time to think about other message makers with campaign money and find links with these organizations. Looking at what successful programs in other states have done may also be a helpful tool.

Shifting the committee's early learning focus to birth to eight is an upcoming change. As Voices for Illinois Children begins to look at this arena and there is national support behind this movement, the ELC should adjust their focus.

Before the meeting closed, Ms. Vitale explained that Frank Kisner, with the Illinois Department of Insurance, is reaching out to the community with presentations about the new insurance plans. If this committee can give a list of events to the co-chairs, Mr. Kisner will come to these events and setup a booth or speak in front of groups. His email address is [Frank.Kisner@illinois.gov](mailto:Frank.Kisner@illinois.gov).

Ms. Villano and Ms. Vitale will work on new strategic plans after the early learning consult meeting at the end of October. It was agreed that the next PAC meeting will tentatively be held in January.

**There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.**