



December 2024 Council Meeting

Date/Time: December 9, 2024, 9:00-11:00am-website states different meeting dates

Location: NH Employment Security, 45 S. Fruit Street, Concord

Participants (10 voting members):

- Christine Brennan
- Christine Santaniello
- Jane Bard
- Athena Cote
- Jess Carson (nominee)
- Christina D'Allesandro (nominee)
- Christina Lachance (Director)
- Rebecca Woitkowski
- Rich Lavers
- Alexa Simmons
- Michelle Lewis
- Jeanne Agri
- Steve Zadravec

Additional members in attendance:

- **Kim Nesbitt**

Council Business (Christina Lachance)

- Jess Carson will replace Kim Nesbitt on the Council and as the lead of the Scientific Advisory Panel
- Approval of meeting minutes
 - Motion to approve October minutes (Jane Bard)*
 - Seconded (Chris S.)*
 - Motion approved by consensus*
- Council meeting dates for 2025
 - ~~March 7, 10-12~~ (will be rescheduled)
 - June 13, 10-12
 - September 5, 10-12
 - December 5, 10-12

NHED Updates (Christine Brennan)

- Teacher of the year event last week was very successful. Both Governor Elect Kelly Ayotte and Governor Sununu attended. One finalist from Manchester was a special education teacher for an autism classroom; it provided an opportunity to think about how we're doing with special education.
- Candice Deangilis is the teacher of the year and she is from Bedford.
- Working on an idea with Marga, one of the TOY panelists and a host on WZID, to work on a radio show segment to celebrate teachers and elevate the profession as a whole.

DHHS Updates (Chris Santaniello, Athena Cote)

Update on NH's CCDF Plan, federal feedback and NH response

- Still interviewing candidates for chief of the Bureau of Child Development and Head Start Collaborative
- Statewide Leadership Team meeting on October 15 was very successful. Data was helpful to inform the discussion. January meeting will include Jess Carson, Rich Lavers, and

representatives (Nicole Heller and Phil Flatnu) from NH Fiscal Policy Institute will be present to discuss the gaps and opportunities in child care.

- Approximately 32% increase in families enrolled and linked in child care scholarship program since eligibility expansion in January.
 - DHHS is looking to improve the application process.
- Feedback on the CCDF plan has come in. Response is due in January.
 - Plan was approved with conditions, which is typical
 - A couple items we need to respond to are requirements that we're not fully compliant in, or that weren't complete at the time of the application.
 - One was to pay all providers prospectively
 - Another is to complete in-state background checks with fingerprints for all staff. An emergency rule was just put forward on this.
 - We also want to improve the response rate on the market rate survey.
- The NH Early Childhood Funders Collaborative is working on the true cost of child care. This will be a collaborative, data-based analysis. It will take a while to get the results.
 - Christina D'Allesandro: the state and some independent researchers are working with child care providers and Carsey and NHFPI researchers to develop and agree upon a true cost of care. It's expected to take a couple of years.
 - Jess Carson: the outside researchers are a really great partner in this work. Updates will be released throughout the process before the full report.
- Maternal and Child Health Survey (Athena Cote)
 - Title V Block Grant
 - A collaborative across the department between the Bureau of Family Centered Services
 - The Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant was enacted to improve the health of women, mothers, infants, children and adolescents, including those with special health care needs, and their families.
 - In New Hampshire, Title V supports direct and enabling services, population-based programs, and infrastructure-building initiatives that address the most pressing health issues in the state
 - These health issues include maternal mortality and morbidity, access to primary care, injury prevention, and newborn screening.
 - Needs Assessment Survey
 - The needs assessment for 2025-2030 is currently underway. We are seeking input from a wide and diverse range of stakeholders.
 - The information from this survey will be used to determine what health needs, challenges, and supports for women, mothers, children, and families are most important in New Hampshire
 - Results will be used to develop an MCH State Action Plan for the next five years, Request for Council members to help spread the word about the survey – links are in the slides. Flyer will be posted with meeting minutes.
 - Participants of the survey are anonymous and can win a \$50 Walmart gift card
 - Questions can be directed to MCH at DHHS via email at mch@dhhs.nh.gov
 - Information about this was in the DHHS newsletter – subscribe if you don't already receive this.
 - **Questions:**
 - Michelle Lewis: NH Family Voices (NHFV) and Parent Information Center (PIC) are doing a survey of children birth-21 with a special health

care need. This includes focus groups, interviews. Staff who speak diverse languages have been hired to reach underrepresented families. Can these families PIC/NHFV is reaching fill out the Maternal and Child Health survey?

- Athena will check this and follow up.
- (Unknown, possibly Richard Lavers) Do we have this electronically already?
 - Athena, I do and I will send it to Christina after
 - (UK) That way we can get it up in the New Hampshire Works offices as well.
- (Unknown) In the form of a social media post?
 - Athena, We could probably figure that out
 - Chris S, we can definitely figure that out
 - Athena, It was in the newsletter right? If you are not a subscriber already, please subscribe as we put out a wealth of information. It is a great spot to find out what is going on.

NH Paid Family Medical Leave Updates (NH PFML; Deputy Commissioner Rich Lavers)

- **Statutory 60 day enrollment from December 1 through January 29**
- Flyers are available for distribution to the public – specific to individual enrollment. They've been delivered to primary care offices throughout the state.
- Voluntary plan for the employer and employee
 - If employer does not offer it, employee can sign up on their own
- Base Plan for Employers
 - 6 weeks of coverage per year at 60% wage replacement
 - BET tax credit of 50% of premium paid by the employer
- Individual Plan
 - Enrolling through January 29
 - Same coverage as employer plan
 - One-time 7-month waiting period, but no exclusions for pre-existing conditions, this waiting period is only done one time. Meaning if you re-enroll after your first year you do not wait again.
 - Premiums no more than \$5 per week
 - Not eligible for the tax credit
- Qualifying Events
 - Similar to short-term disability: individual's health condition, child bonding (most common use currently), an immediate family member's health condition, leave during military deployment or service, caring for a military service member
- Currently 23,300 workers have access to PFML benefits
- This is third open enrollment period
- Christine Santaniello: do you know if any individuals dropped their plans because their employers added coverage?
 - Yes, that happens at times. Employers can buy in at any time, if this change happens during the year, employees would not to enroll the coming year.
- Nearly 70% of PFML policies are paid for by the employers
- Unknown: Do you have any statistics about who was already offering a benefit if they have chosen to invest in the program and stacked what they were offering?
 - Rich: In terms of having something equivalent to this prior to the program coming out?

- Yes Prior to adding this or stacking this. I know in California a lot of people would purchase the state program and then they would stack or provide their own benefits to get people to 100%. I was just wondering if you had any statistics on that.
- Rich, We do and I can share them with you. I don't have it here but I can tell you that for the employers that are purchasing coverage about 65% of them are not coordinating it with an existing short term disability plan. Employers are encouraged to coordinate with existing leave and we do that by offering significant discounts in the cost of this coverage was the risk is reduced when employers have a short term disability plan as well. 40% of the cost is knocked off through Metlife
- Unknown question: So if the employer does that sort of stacking does that extend the amount of time benefit for an individual to 12 weeks instead of 6?
 - Rich: Yes it can, depending on the leave provided by the short term disability. In those scenarios the short term disability pays first, and then to the extent that the qualifying event continues PFML kicks in.
 - (UK) But you could also stack to increase the wage?
 - Rich, Yes employers can go up to 100%
- About 65% of these employers were not offering short term disability in addition to PFML. We encourage those with short-term disability to layer their plans together.
 - The objective in layering plans is to extend leave longer than 6 weeks, or to increase wage replacement to 100%.
- Under individual plans, the majority of participants are female (75%), under 45 (66%) and claims are for bonding with a newborn (80%).
- Would like to increase awareness of use for family care giving
- Metlife paid over \$3 million in benefits during 2023 and 2024 with the average total individual benefit in 2023 \$4700
- Enrollment process for employers should be no more than 10 minutes
- Individuals can request a quote through the website
 - \$5 premium is not guaranteed but average premium is less than \$5 a month
- Links to more information are in the slides
- **Questions**
 - **Unknown: Have you done any work with our service links aging and disability resource centers for the whole family caregiver program**
 - **Rich, Yeah I did reach out to Wendy and Wendy was putting the information out in their newsletters**
 - Can leave for family care be intermittent?
 - Yes, in 4-hour blocks minimum, as long as the event qualifies for coverage under the Family Medical and Leave Act
 - To clarify it has to be FMLA qualifying but not utilizing?
 - Rich, Yeah it only needs to be qualifying.

Children's Museum of New Hampshire (CMNH; Jane Bard)

- Overview: started in 1983 in Portsmouth, moved to Dover in 2008
- 19,000 SF of exhibits and classrooms
- Budget is \$1.6M annually, not for profit
- Served 104,000 people in 2023 – building back since COVID
- Focus is play-based learning; exhibits are New Hampshire-focused, all built on-site
- STEAM Programming
 - Innovation lab since 2017 – classroom space

- Welcome about 10,000 students from around NH for school groups every year
 - Group programming for a variety of ages and groups (camps, young children, school-age, etc.)
- Early Learning Experiences
 - Baby story time weekly – free 6mos to 2 years
 - Wee ones Wednesdays (2- to 4-year-olds)
 - Monthly Live Performances
- Since COVID, there has been a rise in families using the museum as an alternative preschool experience
 - A lot of grandparent caregivers and other “non traditional” caregivers have memberships
- Access for All
 - Sensory friendly hours
 - Free field trips and bus reimbursement for Title 1 schools, Headstart
 - \$3 admission for EBT/SNAP/WIC families, must show card
 - New \$30 annual memberships available for EBT/SNAP/WIC families
 - Free admission for aides/therapists visiting with a client
 - Free admission passes distributed to social service agencies
 - If your agency does not have free passes and you would benefit from them please contact Jane Bard
 - 50% discount for library patrons
 - 50% discount for military families
 - Front desk staff are trained to identify families who are hesitant to pay entrance fee, and to offer those visitors free passes
 - Continually looking for additional ways to collaborate and reach more families
 - Work with outside agencies to identify groups that might be missing and could benefit from reduced admission cost
- Play-based Learning in New Hampshire
 - Since the 2018 play-based kindergarten state mandate, CMNH has worked with UNH Early Childhood Coaching Team and Kim Nesbitt
 - 2018 received an IMLS grant to help kindergarten teachers in conjunction with UNH partnership to understand what play based learning curriculum was
 - Although some in person plans were way laid due to COVID, reached over 62,000 educators due to the strong demand for online content during COVID
 - Initiatives included 20 Play Based Learning Tips and Activities, 12 Educational Videos, 4 virtual workshops for educators, 2 kindergarten open house events at the museum, 20 free virtual field trips with materials shipped to 20 kindergarten classes
 - Applied for second IMLS grant with a goal to educate families and early childhood educators, family resource centers and libraries about the importance of play based learning (PBL)
 - After putting the call out to partners, they received 83 responses and were funded for 30. Kim helped find the money to include everyone who wanted to participate
 - Kits were created and sent out reaching 9,946 children
 - Initiatives included 83 kits of PBL materials, 10 monthly activity guides for kits, 2 new PBL videos for babies and toddlers, 52 drop-in PBL activities for museum visitors, free museum admission for childcare providers, PBL social media campaign, 10,000 PBL postcards with link to

- free resources distributed to childcare provides and families visiting the museum
- Currently working on reaching family childcare providers who might not have access to resources
 - Working with 100 in-home childcare providers to distribute both materials and information across the state serving 846 children
 - Initiatives include 100 kits of PBL materials and activity guides, 8 workshops at libraies throughout NH, 4 virtual workshops that can be accesses at their convenience, 6 online gatherings with guest speakers and a facilitated Facebook group to share ideas, open house for providers and their families at CMNH
- All information from three projects have been disseminated to state librarians in NH
- Presented with UNH at the Association for Children’s Museum National Conference in New Orleans
- Presented at the New England Museum Association conference
- Received an excellence award for ingenuity and innovation
- Feedback has been very positive - child care providers, family resource centers are seeing changes in their classrooms and interactions with families
 - Surveys show understanding of play based learning is increasing
 - Providers are also feeling more connected within the community
- Looking ahead: goal is to reach more centers and to give more materials to large centers
 - They know the need is out there and now they have to find where the funding will come from and determine next steps to continue making a difference
- **NEW: Wonder & Wellness initiative**
 - Social emotional program
 - Developed in collaboration with community-based orgs and family service providers
 - Goal: normalize discussions about mental health and emotional well-being – give caregivers tools to support their own mental health and that of their family members
 - Initiatives include 10 Wonder & Wellness signs with “Try This” activities, take-home cards to reinforce wellness concepts, create a calming room with resources for visitors, host wellness workshops featuring experts/community partners, develop and host “Mindful Moments” staff facilitated calming activities for families
- Contact Jane Bard (jbard@childrens-museum.org) with any questions or ideas for collaboration
- **Questions:**
 - Christine Brennan: Where did the funding for play-based learning initiatives come from? Specifically was it PDG funding or UNH funding?
 - Kim: The first was IMLS (Institute for Museum and Library Services, a federal grant) funding. Then the funding was blended with PDG funds for secondplay-based programming. For Family-based provider outreach the funding was added from Community Development Finance Authority (with support from DHHS)
 - Christine Brennan: Can you share stats on how many schools are utilizing Title I funding for museum visits?

- Yes, Jane will share
- Christine Brennan: When you collaborated with libraries, did you provide trainings?
 - Jane: Yes, they received the same training as child care providers.
 - The current program they are hosting workshops at libraries that providers and family are welcome to attend
 - Kim: State Library System has been a strong partner in all of this. Outreach to public school librarians could be a way to expand the reach of play-based learning.
- Christine Santaniello: Can you share data on how many SNAP/EBT/WIC families are using the discounts?
 - Yes, Jane will share
- Christina Lachance: It sounds like there may be an opportunity for preschoolers with IEPs and IDEA-funded service providers to connect with/utilize CMNH programming. Are there other billing mechanisms for these special populations that the museum could tap into or is it more their service providers tapping into that?
 - Jane, unsure as they have not explored this
- Rich Lavers: Kudos for the CMNH approach to making the museum accessible to all. The sensitivity to families of varying financial need is wonderful.

Impact of the Preschool Development Grant (Kim Nesbitt)

Highlights of PDG work can be found in the presentation and in handouts. Focus of the presentation is “lessons learned” and recommendations to the Council as they move forward post-PDG.

- PDG funding connected a number of incredible groups together, and sustaining those connections will be important.
- NH PDG sought to support New Hampshire’s vision that all families are afforded comprehensive and responsive supports, so they are healthy, learning, and thriving now and in the future
- Two “planning” grants (2019, 2023), ~\$4 million each
- Three-year (2020-2022), \$27 million implementation grant
- Goal: strengthen NH’s early childhood system to be
 - Effective
 - Inclusive
 - Responsive
 - Efficient
 - Evidence-informed
- Needs Assessments
 - PDG provided an opportunity to ask questions that weren’t tied to an existing funding mechanism
 - With the reduction of PDG as existing in our state for the interim, we really need to consider how do we provide these more comprehensive needs assessments that tie the pieces together
 - Provided the opportunity to do research we wanted to, rather than needs assessments with specific foci, as dictated by other federal funding streams (like Title V surveys Athena spoke about)
 - One opportunity for continuation: The NH ECE Research Consortium (Jess Carson), funding provided by the Couch Family Foundation
- Inter-agency Coordination

- No funding to continue this coordination, but ECITs and Council leadership will be taken over by the departments of health and human services and education and their co-leads
- Initiatives needing continuation:
 - Website maintenance, funded through June [2025]
 - Strategic Plan – update in 2025
 - Measures of Success updates – really valuable data to inform strategic initiatives
 - Success measures and who is going to update them on an annual basis
 - Data Interoperability – integrated reporting to guide continuous quality improvement
 - There were a lot of requests to create more interoperability throughout PDG, but there's still work to be done to integrate DHHS and NHED data systems
- Early Childhood Regional Systems Building/Regional Infrastructure
 - Community grants – a lot of funding went into communities throughout the grant; there's no similar funding going out
 - Regional Leads – need funding mechanisms to maintain their coordinated work
- Family Knowledge, Choice and Engagement
 - Parent Information Center/NH Family Voices has been an incredible partner – continue to support their work
 - 6 Full-Service Community School Planning Grants – another mechanism to support local initiatives and create collaboration between key community-based organizations; there's no similar funding to continue this
- Early Childhood Workforce Supports
 - Tuition assistance
 - CCDF tuition assistance will continue, but it limits the number of courses students can take per semester
 - More than 140 paraprofessionals participated
 - They will not have access to other EC workforce tuition assistance programs (CCDF funding)
 - Infrastructure support for family child care providers
 - CDFA engaged 225 aspiring and established FCC businesses
 - Without funding, only continuation of this effort is the resource website hosted by CDFA
- Play-based Learning
 - Resources, workshops, community partnerships, embedded coaching
 - 120 teachers coached across 30 school districts
 - No funding mechanism for continuing coaching work
 - Partnerships and training for Children's Museum, Family Resource Centers, local libraries can be a way to continue to reach communities with this information and materials
- Resources from PDG are available on the UNH Scholar's Repository after NH PDG funding ends: <https://scholars.unh.edu/earlychildhood/>
- PDG Summary handouts are available on the Council website
- **Questions/Comments:**
 - Kim: All documents that have been handed out were emailed, including a summary of the PPP, lessons learned for planning grants, and resource recommend by PDG planning officer regarding funding opportunities

- Michelle Lewis: in January an early childhood development website, aligns with DRDP (desired results developmental profile) will go live from NH PIC/NHFV. This was developed in close collaboration with PDG and UNH Play-Based Learning Coaches, and cross-walked with Desired Results Developmental Profile and NH Early Learning Standards. It will have a ton of resources and will share even more play-based learning resources with families.

Legislative Updates (no legislators present; Rebecca Woitkowski)

- Senator Whitley is now not a Senator, in the new year co-leads will work with Senate President to see who will be assigned (Christina Lachance)
- New Futures initiatives (not formally agreed to, but in development)
 - Continue changes that went into effect a couple years ago (expansion of CCDF to 85% state median income)
 - Will advocate for anything needed to support the CCDF plan
 - Omnibus 2.0 – increasing pathways to maternal and child health supports through a variety of strategies

Public Comment:

Sarah Fox (Program Director, NH Alliance Early Childhood Coalitions) – the recent convening was very successful; HOPE Framework was presented; Brain Architecture Game was a very successful tool to help folks think about early development. Echoes Kim's mention of reaching into communities with funding – connections formed at the community level have been very impactful.

Motion to adjourn (Jeanne Agri)

Seconded (Christine Brennan)

Motion approved by consensus.