



**CHILDREN'S CABINET BOARD MEETING
APPROVED MINUTES**

December 12, 2017

Capitol Press Room 4th Floor

Cabinet Members/Representatives Attendees:

Deputy Secretary OJJ Dr. James Bueche, Jr.
Judge Desiree Cook Calvin
Secretary DCFS Marketa Walters
Secretary LWC Ava Dejoie (Represented by Benny Soulier)
Commissioner John L. Dardenne Jr. (Represented by Marsha Shuler)
Secretary LDH Dr. Rebekah Gee (Represented by Michelle Alletto)
Secretary LED Donald Pierson, Jr. (Represented by David Carter)
Superintendent John C. White
CCAB Chair Sherry Guarisco

Cabinet Members Absent:

Representative Barbara W. Carpenter
Kathy Edmonston
Representative Yvonne Colomb

Call to Order:

Dr. Dana Hunter, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. and welcomed members and guests to the December 12th Children's Cabinet Board Meeting.

Roll Call:

Roll call following the welcome remarks by Dr. Hunter was conducted by Stephanie Neal.

Opening Remarks: Governor John Bel Edwards and First Lady Donna Edwards provided the opening remarks. Governor Edwards welcomed Cabinet Members and thanked them for their hard work and participation. Governor Edwards reported on the following initiatives:

- No Kid Hungry-LA Campaign that was initiated statewide and provides a healthy breakfast for students at participating schools.
- Louisiana Fosters Initiative in which First Lady Donna Edwards has been involved. Governor Edwards reported that there were a record number of adoptions in the state this year out of the foster care program.

Governor Edwards also commented on the Human Trafficking Symposium. Summits are currently being held across the state. In addition to the Human Trafficking Symposium a Human Trafficking Commission and Advisory Board has been created and has become active.

In addition to the previously mentioned events it was also reported by the Governor that the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund has been moved to the Office of the Governor.

Governor Edwards stated that a lot has been done to improve conditions for children and families in the state but there is a lot of work left to be done. He mentioned that new initiatives are needed but the Cabinet needs to continue and maintain efforts that have already been started. Any new ideas for new initiatives or how to improve current initiatives are welcome and encouraged.

First Lady Donna Edwards discussed the Louisiana First Foundation. The Foundation was originally created to raise funds and awareness for Teach MAM (Music, Art and Movement) is now the umbrella for Louisiana Fosters. The Casey Foundation has already committed funds to Louisiana Fosters. The First Lady also reported that Louisiana First is also focused on foster children and their families during the holiday season.

Approval of Minutes:

Dr. Hunter, Children's Cabinet Executive Director, called for a review of the minutes and agenda. Deputy Secretary OJJ, Dr. James Bueche, Jr. made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Secretary Marketa Walters seconded the motion. All approved. Motion approved.

Highlight: Children's Cabinet Initiatives: Dr. Dana Hunter presented the update on Children's Cabinet Initiatives.

- a.) *Children's Cabinet meetings:* Four (4) Children's Cabinet meetings were held this year with participation by Governor Edwards and the First Lady at three of the meetings.
- b.) *No Kid Hungry Louisiana:* The No Kid Hungry-LA initiative was launched in September. Since that time an additional 90 sites have adopted CEP. Also, during the month of October 2017 three hundred schools have enrolled in the School Breakfast Challenge to encourage participation in school breakfast program which surpassed the original goal of 100. Since the launch of NKH-LA 41,000 students now have access to healthy meals at school.
- c.) *Human Trafficking:* The first Annual Statewide Human Trafficking Symposium was held in Sept. 2017 and had over 400 attendees from across the state. Regional Human Trafficking Summits are scheduled and are being held in each region of the State. During each of the Summits the National Criminal Justice Training Center will send professionals to facilitate discussion during the Summits to discuss what services exist, what's missing, what do we need to do moving forward as well as how to identify victims of human trafficking. Once the Summits are concluded a report will be drafted regarding Human Trafficking in Louisiana from the National Criminal Justice Training Center.
- d.) *Key Legislation:*
 1. SB42: Act 181: Created the Human Trafficking Prevention Commission and Human Trafficking Prevention Advisory Board. The Commission has already met three times this year. They are ready to assess what is needed, what policies are needed as well as what policies are already in existence. Members of the Advisory Board also include former victims of human trafficking.
 2. SB66 – Act 237: Moved the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund from the Department of Children and Family Services to the Office of the Governor.
- e.) *Children's Cabinet Sub-group Committee Presentations:* CCAB had a very successful year in 2017. Group members met and discussed coming up with priorities and recommendations to be presented to the Children's Cabinet. Four sub-committees have been meeting over the past six months and are present to make their presentations/recommendations.

CCAB Sub-Group Committee Presentations:

Early Childhood Mental Health: Sherry Guarisco and Dr. Sharon Hinshaw-Fuselier presented on Early Childhood Mental Health.

Dr. Fuselier reported on the importance of early childhood experiences and the first three years of life for brain development. The specific neuro-circuits developed during this time actually lay the groundwork for mental/physical health, learning and behavior. Primary caregiving is essential for positive brain development. Lack of exposure to language, parental depression, abuse/neglect, exposure to violence has adverse reactions to brain development.

Approximately 10-20% of children under five experience serious social and emotional problems that can compromise their functioning, development and school readiness. Without adequate intervention, social-emotional problems can escalate into school dropout, substance abuse and juvenile delinquency. Even in the absence of diagnosable issue, differences in early experiences lead to disparities in learning and behavior that persist well beyond early childhood. For example, gaps in academic achievement between poor and non-poor children that are apparent by the 3rd grade are maintained through high school, even though children advance academically at roughly the same rate (i.e. one grade level/year); closing the gap before children begin school is essential to improving success.

The following recommendations were made:

- a.) Convene key stakeholders to finalize and operationalize an Early Childhood Master Plan for Louisiana's approach to supporting the healthy development of its youngest citizens.
- b.) Identify and secure funding to pilot a locally coordinated, comprehensive cross-sector of supports, from promotion to intervention, for families with infants and very young children. Link families with community resources that are responsive to families basic needs (i.e. housing, workforce development and child care, social-emotional/behavioral support needs (i.e. home visitation, parent education, early intervention), high quality mental health services (i.e. Child-Parent Psychotherapy, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy), and support for professionals (i.e. training, early childhood mental health consultation for physicians, early intervention specialists, home visitors, child care providers).

Childhood Hunger: Alfreda Tillman Bester presented on Childhood Hunger.

In Louisiana 20.2% of our 4.68 million people lived in poverty. According to the 2016 ALICE Report, 42% of Louisiana households struggle financially, are at risk of hunger, and have limited access to feeding programs. In 2014, 41% of the country's SNAP households had earned income; SNAP beneficiaries who were not employed included the disabled, children (72%) and the elderly (25%).

The immediate need is to feed children who come to school hungry and feed those children. In addition Ms. Bester reported that her sub-group identified two proposed pilot programs in the Louisiana Delta area that are designed to implement summer feeding programs. Three parishes were contacted by the sub-committee and as of this date and time two parishes have committed to provide this service.

The following recommendations were made:

- a.) Full funding for programs sufficient to provide for the safety and health of Louisiana's people, especially children, living in poverty. Adequate outreach funds are essential.
- b.) Leverage 2-1-1 to help families locate the nearest source of available food assistance, such as Summer Feeding Sites and local food banks.

Services for Older Foster Care Youth: Amanda Brunson presented on Services for Older Foster Care Youth.

Of the 4,378 children in foster care in Louisiana, 677 are age 14 or older, and 171 are age 17. Over the past three years an average of 161 youth have aged out of foster care annually. Youth who age out of the system are less likely to earn a high school diploma, or GED, or complete college. Additionally, they are more likely to be homeless, have PTSD, get arrested, or be incarcerated. The unemployment rate amongst foster care alumni is 47 percent.

Ms. Brunson stated that since the number of youth aging out is so small that it is a fixable issue. Solutions discussed included the following:

- a.) Specialized DCFS youth caseworkers
- b.) One-stop transition center
- c.) Bank accounts established for older youth
- d.) Foster youth assessed for Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG Program)
- e.) \$300,000 insurance requirement waived for foster youth to drive
- f.) Increased services within the Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing programs
- g.) Foster care extended to age 21, or case management services for children ages 18-21

The following recommendations were made:

- a.) Comprehensive assessment of proposed policy and programmatic solutions, including the required human financial resources necessary for success.
- b.) Establishment of a Youth Advisory Board to include public and private stakeholders.

Services for Children with Disabilities: Marsha Shuler presented on Services for Children with Disabilities.

The main topic was improving Louisiana's schools access to federal Medicaid funding for providing health services to students, particularly the disabled and those with behavioral health issues.

The following recommendations were made:

- a.) Formation of a task force with key players to come up with concrete ways to increase the federal Medicaid dollars that schools receive for health services to students. To make people more knowledgeable about the programs from the Departments of Health and Education, a couple of school systems, one or two non-profits involved in school health and an MCO. Initial recommendations would be due within six months. The idea is to be able to leverage the local dollars schools already spend to draw down federal funds so more services can be provided and hopefully some local dollars freed up that can be used in the classroom. Schools are particularly lagging behind in accessing federal funds for behavioral health services. Providing those services could be most helpful in reducing suspensions and expulsions in schools, providing a better learning experience for all.
- b.) The second recommendation is to pursue what is necessary for the state to participate in the Healthy Students Collaborative.

Questions for CCAB Members:

Remarks from the Governor:

- a.) The Governor requested that Michelle Aletto, LDH, work with Marsha Shuler on getting additional Medicaid/federal funds to help support the School Based Health Centers.
- b.) Governor Edwards also stated that to date CHIP funding has not yet been reauthorized. The Governor intends to work with LDH to avoid any disruption of services if possible.
- c.) The Governor asked Secretary Marketa Walters to work with Senator Barrow to complete a cost and benefits analysis of keeping foster children in care until age 21.
- d.) In addition the Governor asked for strong recommendations for initiatives regarding early childhood intervention. What are the costs and how can we meet these costs? Should we move funds from programs that are not producing and pursue programs that are more evidence based and/or do we need additional dollars and if so how many additional dollars to have a meaningful impact.
- e.) Lastly, Governor Edwards reported that he will continue speaking with school superintendents to further the childhood hunger initiatives throughout the state.

Michelle Aletto stated that LDH and the Children's Cabinet support the recommendations concerning Early Childhood Mental Health and that LDH is committed to honoring those recommendations.

Services for Children with Disabilities: Ms. Aletto also stated that LDH will follow the recommendations presented by Marsha Shuler regarding Services for Children with Disabilities and will work towards getting additional funding for School Based Health Centers.

Early Childhood Budget: Ms. Aletto stated that LDH and the Children's Cabinet It was reported that around 5% of the budget goes towards early childhood development and less than 1% goes to early childhood mental health. Senator Regina Barrow requested further information regarding the budget for early childhood development and why it's only at 5%.

Superintendent John White reported on the dramatic decrease of approximately 50% in children enrolled in the childcare system. Superintendent White stated that there has been a systemic dismantling of the childcare system in the state with the focus and funding moving to school age children ages 5-18 and college students attending school through TOPS aged 18-22.

DCFS Secretary Marketa Walters spoke regarding the recommendations concerning Youth Aging out of Foster Care. Secretary Walters spoke regarding the recommendation that every child in foster care that is eligible for JAG and happens to be in a school where JAG is available be enrolled in the program. The problem with this recommendation is that the children are not necessarily in a permanent situation and that the child could be moved to another school where this service is not available leaving the child unable to complete the program due to transportation issues. Secretary Walters is working with Senator Barrow to address a study resolution regarding youth aging out of foster care and extending the age.

Sherry Guarisco stated that legislation was passed in 2016 that requires colleges/community colleges to designate a liaison for foster children. Ms. Guarisco will pass this information on to Dr. Dana Hunter. In addition Ms. Guarisco stated that in her time on the Children's Cabinet Advisory Board (CCAB) that CCAB and the Children's Cabinet have always supported the expansion of School Based Health Centers and that she is delighted to see that the Cabinet is looking forward to seeing the Cabinet look into increasing funding and access to School Based Health Clinics.

Public Comments:

A concerned parent advocating for her thirteen year old daughter who is being emotionally abused by her father who has sole custody of the child. Are there any organizations that advocate for victims of emotional abuse?

First Lady Donna Edwards raised the question as to whether or not if Wendy's Wonderful Kids are provide for specialized DCFS workers/consultants to work with youth aging out of foster care? Secretary Marketa Walters stated that the main goal is finding adoptive placements and recruiting foster parents. Secretary Walters also reported that one of the top priorities of DCFS is to have specialized workers/consultants, specialists to deal with youth aging out of foster care. The money is just not available for specialized caseload but she will be meeting with staff of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to discuss funding these areas of need.

The First Lady also requested further information as to why school superintendents are turning down or not addressing federal dollars coming in to the school system that support health care centers in schools. The main issue is not having enough personnel in the smaller school systems. Marsha Shuler stated she felt that they need more education about the funds and how they are handled. Discussion followed.

Melanie Bronfin, Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, stated how wonderful it is to have the Governor and the First Lady taking such a stand in issues regarding children and families and early childhood education. Ms. Bronfin also spoke regarding the cuts to childcare assistance. The program has been cut by \$70 million dollars in the past few years which lead to fewer children who are able to receive high quality child care and causing issues with many centers and families.

First Lady Donna Edwards requested further information and understanding of the gap. Dr. Sharon Hinshaw-Fuselier that we need to focus on supports around social and emotional development, behavioral development etc. Parents need to be taught that they need to speak to their children and learn better parenting skills to have the children better prepared when they get to school. Discussion followed.

Adjournment: Dr. James Bueche, Jr. made a motion to adjourn. Secretary Marketa Walters seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried and meeting adjourned.

Next meeting: March 6, 2018
Capitol Press Room, 4th Floor