

**Children’s Cabinet Meeting**

**Unapproved Minutes**

**November 10, 2022**

**Members Present**

Susan East Nelson, Chair of Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board

Secretary Ava Cates, representing Louisiana Workforce Commission

William “Bill” Sommers, Office of Juvenile Justice

Commissioner John “Jay” Dardenne, Commissioner of Administration

Secretary Dr. Courtney Phillips, Department of Health

**Members Present via Zoom**

Senator Regina Barrow

Judge Desiree Cook-Calvin, representing Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

**Representatives Present (Not included in Quorum)**

Joni Landry, representing Superintendent of Education, Dr. Cade Brumley

Tedra Cheatham, representing Secretary Don Pierson, Dept. of Economic Development

**Special Guests**

Governor John Bel Edwards

Dr. Chaunda Mitchell

**Staff:**

Dr. Melanie Washington, Children’s Cabinet Executive Director

Michele Rabalais, LCTF/CC Exec. Assistant

Justin Standifer, Children’s Cabinet Coordinator

**Call to Order**:

Dr. Melanie Washington, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. and introductions were made.

**Roll Call:**

Michele M. Rabalais, Executive Assistant, called roll.

**Welcome and Opening Remarks:**

First Lady Donna Edwards sent her regrets that she was unable to attend the meeting.

Governor John BelEdwards provided the opening remarks.

Governor Edwards reported the following:

1. Governor spoke the New Orleans Rotary Club and Rotary members are interested in working to eradicate Human Trafficking;
2. Almost the end of a rather uneventful hurricane season for Louisiana. Governor Edwards will be sending help to those in Florida suffering from hurricane damage;
3. Louisiana is in a much better place regarding COVID then the previous year. Reports show that cases of COVID have been reduced but there has been an increase in reports of the flu and RSV;
4. Work has begun on the budget for FY 24. The RAC forecast will be available in December and once another in April/May. The Governor has been meeting with all budget units to discuss how much money is available and what the priorities are for the upcoming fiscal year;
5. Continue efforts in especially in early education. Louisiana ranks #1 in improvement of reading skills for fourth graders. Continue TOPS with the primary goal of keeping the best and brightest students in Louisiana;
6. Federal student loan forgiveness has $600,000 available to pay off student loans;
7. Louisiana reports the four months of the lowest unemployment rates;
8. Reforms to industrial tax exemption helps law enforcement and parishes while providing more funds at the local level for education;
9. Continuing work on raising the minimum wage;
10. Discussed concerns about the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) and placing youth at Angola. The situation of placing youth at Angola is not ideal but the youth have been ordered by the courts to be placed in a secure facility. Once complete, Swanson will be more modern and secure. The new campus will be built with 72 beds. At this time approximately 300 youth have been ordered into secure care. 24 of these youth will be moved to Angola. Angola has over 20,000 acres and the youth will be housed temporarily a mile away from regular inmates until a new facility is built.

**Approval of Minutes**: Ava Cates made a motion to approve the April 19th minutes as presented. Susan East Nelson seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.

Susan East Nelson made a motion to approve the July 19th minutes as presented. Ava Cates seconded the motion. All approved. Motion carried.

**CCAB Budget Priority Overview:** Susan East Nelson, Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board Chair, presented the CCAB budget priorities overview.

The latest Annie E. Casey Foundation “Kids Count Data Book” findings show that Louisiana’s children are in the midst of a mental health crisis, struggling with depression and anxiety at extreme levels.

The CCAB subcommittee believes that a Louisiana priority should be retention and recruitment of behavioral health providers, i.e., social workers, licensed counselors, and psychologists to help address this situation.

**Retention of Professionals**

In the area of retention, behavioral health professionals in schools are too often tasked with work that has nothing to do with their professional abilities. Because of various school staffing issues, they end up doing such things as proctoring tests and serving as hall monitors rather than providing the professional services for which they were trained. Allowing behavioral health professionals to concentrate their efforts providing services to students would not only make the jobs more attractive to prospective applications, it would help those professionals overworked by extra duty stay in their jobs and ultimately provide students with the help many of them need in today’s unsettling times.

1. **Recruitment of Professionals**

Recruitment efforts need to be directed at improving the behavioral health professional pipeline through such things as incentives for those in degree programs and partnering with various entities that can provide access to those who need clinical hours for licensing. The Louisiana Department of Education has a grant through LSU’s School of Social Work that places social work students in high-need schools to expand mental health services to students. Another initiative in the Lake Charles area partners with the local human services district to provide Provisional Licensed Professional Counselors who worked in schools to earn clinical hours.

1. **Additional K-12 Mental Health Interventions**
2. Additional school-based health centers that could provide needed behavioral health support at school sites, especially in rural areas which frequently report a shortage of access to providers.
3. Leveraging the resources through Communities in Schools of the Gulf Coast which provides mental health professionals inside public schools in five parishes who give direct intervention and school-wide preventive intervention to students and families.
4. Establishing an electronic health record-data system for Behavioral Health use in schools, similar to one used for students’ special education records. A record system would provide continuity of care for students from school to school and parish to parish. This request has been made over numerous recommendation documents and has still failed to be implemented.
5. **Move Forward on Early Childhood Supports and Services (ECSS)**

Allow progress to continue on the implementation of ECSS by supporting agency planning and cooperative endeavor agreements between known experts in the field as well as those agencies with experience providing wrap-around services. The state should rapidly prototype the best use of resources with the remaining years of funding. (CCAB Early Experience/Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Subcommittee recommendation)

The Vulnerable Youth Subcommittee aims to improve outcomes for Louisiana youth most susceptible to parental abuse and neglect, human trafficking, violence, gang involvement, criminal involvement, substance abuse, physical and mental health disorders, homelessness, poverty, and family instability. The Subcommittee is specifically focused on youth involved with the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as well as youth who are aging out of foster care. The subcommittee’s strategic and proposing strategic recommendations to strengthen state and community supports that will decrease vulnerability to criminal and other adverse childhood experiences, enhance resilience, and minimize long-term repercussions associated with these experiences. The stakes for these young people could not be higher. Budget and legislative priorities necessary to ensure that the state serves these children include:

1. **Prioritize a Comprehensive Caseload/Workload Analysis and Compensation Commensurate to Ensure Sufficient Funding** for the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Non-Secure Care Facilities, Secure Care Facilities, and Formal Family in Need of Services (FINS) of the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ), and Informal FINS to effectively serve children and families and fulfill mandated requirements

Youth involved with DCFS, OJJ (including non-secure care facilities, secure care facilities, and formal FINS), and informal FINS are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable in our state due to multi-system involvement, and histories of trauma. Long-term studies of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and other research statistics regarding further trauma show an increased risk of future mental and physical health consequences.

Before funding new programs or expanding current ones, the state should first ensure that children who are already system-involved have adequate staff to care for them. Otherwise, the state will continue the cycle of expanding and funding new programs, while simultaneously struggling to effectively support children and families already in present systems. For example, juvenile group homes and prisons are understaffed, leaving staff to focus solely on safety instead of rehabilitation—which has impacts on the entire system. If the ultimate punishment is ineffective, everything that precedes it becomes less effective. Furthermore, a shortage of staff to serve the current children in the custody or care of these agencies will inevitably stymie efforts to successfully move upstream toward prevention because those efforts will continue to be put on hold to react to crises caused by the ongoing shortage of staff to meet the agencies’ mandated requirements.

The Vulnerable Youth Subcommittee recommends priority be given immediately to fully assess the number of staff needed and the competitive pay necessary to serve the number of children and families these agencies generally serve annually and accomplish the mandated requirements of these agencies. It is specifically recommended that a caseload/workload analysis and compensation commensurate with recommendations be conducted at a minimum on the staff needed for (1) the child protection investigation, family (in-home) services, and foster care units of DCFS; (2) the non-secure care facilities, secure care facilities, and formal FINS of OJJ; and (3) Informal FINS. In Maine, a similar study was statutorily required over several years, which is also recommended for Louisiana to ensure the study is comprehensively conducted. Once the number of staff needed and competitive pay necessary is determined for each agency, filling those funding gaps should be a priority before funding any new or expansion of existing program mandates so that these agencies can provide quality and effective services to the children and families they serve and accomplish their missions and legal mandates.

**2. Prioritize Funding Statewide for Mobile Crisis Response and Community Brief Crisis Support for Children on Medicaid**

In response to the growing need for quality and accessible mental health services for children, the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) plans to work toward Mobile Crisis Response and Community Brief Crisis Support, which will be available to Louisiana children on Medicaid as part of its Louisiana Crisis Response System. Mobile Crisis Response would provide a 24/7 service as an initial intervention to children on Medicaid in a self-identified crisis, in which a crisis response team deploy to where the child is located in his or her community. Community Brief Crisis Support is a face-to-face ongoing crisis intervention strategy, designed to provide stabilization and support in the child’s community subsequent to an initial intervention. Essentially, children on Medicaid who are experiencing a psychiatric crisis will have access to a continuum of services until the crisis is resolved and/or the child returns to existing services or is linked to other behavioral health supports as needed. This intervention aims to divert children from institutional levels of care, yet respects bed-based crisis services without relying on them as a foundation.

**3. Prioritize Funding to Convene a Statewide Vulnerable Youth Summit to Ensure Youth Education and Support**

Louisiana’s truancy rate has risen by 22% in the past five years and totaled 40.21% during the 2020-21 school year (according to figures compiled by the Louisiana Department of Education). This translates to about 277,000 students statewide. The link between the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in truancy rates is highly likely. The availability of support, resources, and accountability that schools provide to families was completely disrupted during the pandemic, as was the habit of school attendance. With lost employment, housing and food insecurity, health impacts, and a lack of technology for participation in virtual school, families faced overwhelming challenges that resulted in youth missing significant amounts of schooling.

With youth truancy on the rise in Louisiana, youth vulnerability is on the rise. Youth truancy has long been correlated with delinquency, substance abuse, physical and mental health issues, gang activity, and family instability. Schools have historically provided a safety net for vulnerable youth, identifying those who need extra support and intervening before crisis hits. Schools connect youth and their families to needed services. It is essential for local stakeholders to work together to reengage vulnerable youth in school and ensure they have the support they need at school. Some schools have implemented truancy programs, school flight diversion programs, mental health support programs, school re-engagement programs, Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), alternatives to suspensions and expulsions.

It is recommended that Louisiana prioritize funding to proactively address the truancy crisis before juvenile justice and child welfare system involvement skyrockets. A statewide Vulnerable Youth Summit would help ensure that youth return to school while receiving the support that they need. The Summit should include representatives from the juvenile courts, juvenile justice leadership, FINS, school superintendents, and others. The Summit would educate stakeholders on the truancy crisis and call for collaboration among local juvenile courts, juvenile justice leadership, FINS, and school systems to create strategies and solutions to support youth in their communities.

The Early Learning, Literacy, and K-12 Subcommittee makes the following recommendations that build on the budget and legislative work done for FY2022. The recommendations are as follows:

1. **Continue funding for the READ program** that became law in Act 395. The $5 million appropriation

was only for FY2022 and it needs to be re-appropriated for FY2023.

1. **Continue efforts to increase pay for educators from birth – 12th grade**. Retention and recruitment

across the educator continuum is essential to maintaining a stable and sustainable system of education from birth until the end of secondary education.

1. **Fully fund the requirements of Act 108 for K-3 teachers** to get the necessary training in the science of reading.
2. **Provide for full-time literacy coaches in all K-12 schools** to support job-embedded literacy professional development and teacher support.
3. **Invest $115 Million of state funds**, as recommended by the Early Childhood Care and Education Commission, **to fully launch LA B-to-3**, and increase program funding every year for 10 years.

The Family Stability Subcommittee focuses on child hunger as well as the broader range of family supports. Our state continues to struggle with a disconnected patchwork of services that often keep families from getting all of the support they need. In a number of family stability programs, the historical legacy of the way we have always operated blocks innovation and keeps the state from taking advantage of historic federal programs that can make a demonstrable difference in the lives of families. The core recommendation of this subcommittee is as follows:

**Continue to work on the No Wrong Door Approach**

On January 1, 2022, DCFS activated the DCFS No Wrong Door Project to expand the pilot program into an agency- wide infrastructure to enhance client services. DOC is now implementing some of these elements to enable the two agencies to better serve shared clients/families. This opportunity also provided Louisiana 2-1-1 with much needed capacity building resources to serve families, year-round, and during times of disaster activations. The Louisiana Association of United Ways serves as the project contract administrator and is eager to continue the work with an expansion across geographies and sectors in the state.

**Louisiana Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs (BGCLA):** Missy Andrade, BGCLA Chief Impact Officer, presented information regarding the Louisiana Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs.

Ms. Andrade stated that the Louisiana Alliance of Boys and Girls enables young people especially those at high risk to reach achieve academic success, live healthy lifestyles and develop good character and citizenship.

Boys and Girls Club of Louisiana (BGCLA) is a statewide organization which will have approximately 30 sites in urban rural areas as well as military bases in 30 different areas.

In addition Ms. Andrade informed the Board that 61% of the youth served come from single family households and that many of the families live in poverty. Meals and snacks are provided to the youth that are members of BGCLA. Discussion followed.

**Children’s Cabinet Initiative:** Dr. Melanie Washington, Children’s Cabinet Director and Justin Standifer, Children’s Cabinet Coordinator, presented information regarding the Children and Youth Planning Boards (CYPB).

Dr. Washington gave a brief overview of the CYPB. In 2003 Act 1225 was passed and crated the Juvenile Justice Reform Act Implementation Commission (JJRAIC). The JJRAIC and the Children’s Cabinet then established ACCT 555 in 2004 at which time the Children and Youth Planning Boards were created.

The purpose of CYPB is as follows:

\*Address the many issues and needs of at-risk children and youth at the local level

\*To assist in the assessment, alignment, coordination, prioritization and measurement of all

available services and programs that address the needs of children and youth.

Act 55 mandated that A CYPB be created and established in each state judicial district by the Governing Authority of each parish in that district.

CYPB’s are intended to address children and youth at risk for or identified with the following issues. These issues include the following but are not limited to the issues below:

* Social/Emotional/Developmental Problems
* Educational Failure
* Abuse/Neglect
* Exposure to violence
* Youth or parental mental illness
* Youth or parental substance abuse
* Poverty
* Developmental Disabilities
* Delinquency

The Intended Goals/Outcomes of CYPB are as follows:

* Promote services which encourage positive development
* Diversion of children and youth from criminal justice and foster care systems
* Reduction in the commitment of youth to state institutions
* Provisions of community responses to a growing rate of juvenile delinquency

Justin Standifer, Children’s Cabinet Coordinator, reported the following goals of CYPB:

1. At least one CYPB in each region – to start
2. These CYPB’s can potentially serve as pilots to surrounding judicial districts/parishes
3. Add CYPB’s in two judicial districts per region (27 CYPB’s total)
4. Identify governing entity and lead agency by March 2023

In addition Mr. Standifer reported that Children’s Cabinet staff at this time are involved with CYPB’s as follows:

1. Providing Support, Guidance, Training
2. Establishing a reporting mechanism and guidelines from local level to state, evaluation
3. Identifying statewide and local resources available to local communities
4. Planning a state retreat for CYPB Chairpersons/Lead Agencies

In addition Children’s Cabinet staff has identified six areas where CYPB’s are defunct or never had a CYPB in that area. Staff is currently working on locating two more areas where a CYPB can be created as well as offering training, and identifying local and statewide resources currently available. Children’s Cabinet staff hopes to have CYPB’s up and running in all 42 Judicial Districts in order to help have more children living and thriving in safe and healthy communities. Discussion followed.

**Other Business:** Dr. Washington introduced Storm Ehlers, newly appointed Deputy Judicial Administrator for Children and Families at the Louisiana Supreme Court.

**Public Comments:** Concerned parents and adults spoke out concerning the Juvenile Justice System. It was requested that work be done to find ways to reach children/youth before they enter the system. Try and catch the children/youth before they get in trouble.

In addition concerned parents and adults spoke out and about the issue of children/youth being sent to Angola. Discussion followed.

It was stated that the children are our future and steps should be taken to make sure children have a future once the adults in their lives are gone.

**Adjournment:** Ava Dejoie made a motion to adjourn. Susan East Nelson seconded the motion. All approved. Meeting adjourned**.**