
Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing Affordable, High Quality Child Care

Monthly Meeting: May 19, 2016

Fourth Floor Conference Room, 109 State Street, Montpelier VT

Chairman: Charlotte Ancel
Secretary: Jessica Blackman

Meeting convened at 10:07

Quorum Present

Attendees

Present:

Michelle Fay
Steven Lambrecht
Charlotte Ancel
David Rubel
Melissa Riegel-Garrett
Paul Dragon
Laurel Bongiorno
Justin Johnson
Christine Gibson
Donna Bailey
Reeva Murphy

Present via Conference Call:

Chloe Leary
Paul Behrman

Absent:

Frank Cioffi
Rachel Hunter
Melissa Bailey
Mary Burns

Introductions /Housekeeping

- Charlotte calls meeting to order.
- Members introduce themselves to the public.
- Jessica Blackman, new administrator, introduces herself. Asks to establish a steering committee for catching up and in-between-meeting organization.
 - Steering Committee: Charlotte Ancel, Jess Gingras, Reeva Murphy
- Introduction of new commissioner, Steven Lambrecht, who will be replacing Colonel Luke Ahmann, who is scheduled to be deployed in July.

10:20 Presentation from Cheryl Mitchell

See “Presentation from Cheryl Mitchell,” Below Minutes

- Four sources of early childcare funding:
 - Parent Tuition
 - Public Support (Block Grant, Head Start, TANF etc.)
 - Leaning on Childcare Providers
 - Private Investments (municipal government, United Way, Employer cafeteria programs)

- Early childcare models from four other developed nations
 - France
 - Finland
 - South Korea
 - Italy/Reggio Emilia

- Special Topics:
 - Childcare models: We don’t know how the type of childcare (Montessori, SummerHill, Waldorf) effects how children fare upon entering public school.
 - Special Education: In these other countries, children with special needs don’t experience a big change when entering public school. They are largely integrated into the classroom and don’t need aids as often as U.S. children. The focus is on teacher training and nurturing skills across the board, rather than individual help.
 - Tax Base: Though other countries pay somewhat higher taxes, when you look at what they get back (healthcare, childcare, higher education), they are paying somewhat less out of pocket.

- Vermont has been successful at effective transformations:
 - Post Hurricane infrastructure rebuilding
 - Long Term Care
 - Failing Agriculture

- Follow up questions/discussions.
- Major themes/takeaway: The importance of a larger cultural context for investing in childcare. What is the philosophy/goal of the program? What is Vermont’s social contract? What is Vermont’s overarching family policy?

11:30 Discussion

- There is the desire among many commission members to continue these discussions in between meetings. How can we do that?
- **Task: Think about how to do this.**
- Can we set aside time at next meeting to digest not only this presentation but previous presentations?

11:40 Brief presentation about PCG's proposal (See "PCG Presentation.ppt")

- Attempt to pick date for kickoff meeting.
- June 2 and June 8 not good dates
- Perhaps a smaller group will do kickoff with PCG and bring back information at next full Commission meeting (June 16)
- **Task: Coordinate smaller group kickoff with PCG**

11:45 PCG calls in to meeting

- Jamie Kilpatrick and Pamela Fuqua-Burke introduce themselves and talk about their team
- Ask for any relevant work that has informed the commission so far:
 - Lets Grow Kids presentations
 - CCDBG State Plan
 - Market Rate Studies
 - Living Wage Reports
 - Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office Basic Needs Budget

Task: Compile an exhaustive list

- Ask for summary of what the commission has done so far:
Reeva Murphy responds:
 - Formulated a set of questions that guide the work
 - Created a project plan
 - Established a working definition of quality (**Task: figure out how to pass this on to PCG**)
 - Next phase is talking about Affordability (goal is to tie in the living wage reports and what is available to help people pay for childcare)

12:10 Final discussions (planning and presentation follow up)

- Establish steering committee for PCG Planning/Communication:
 - Charlotte, Reeva, Donna, Chloe, The Jessicas
- What are Vermont's best practices?
- What works versus what do we want?
- What's the purpose of the system?
- Birth to 3 is so connected to healthcare – how can we tie that in?
- How can we connect healthcare services for 0 – Pre-K
- How can we get assignment done but also talk about larger cultural childcare needs?
- Discuss the Tulsa conference?
- Can we start planning public forums? Can we get dates set for those? **Task: Talk with PCG/Commission -Propose dates?**

Meeting adjourned at 12:31 pm

APresentation from Cheryl Mitchell

Background:

Cheryl started out as a childcare administrator and was one of the earliest people to start exploring how Vermont can support families. She worked with Governor Dean at the Agency of Human Services for roughly 10 years, taught at UVM, and, now with a three-year-old granddaughter, continues to be personally invested in the health of the system.

She has a belief that things should be simple, but also a love for Byzantine architecture in all its complexity. Vermont has a Byzantine childcare system – a complex maze that both parents and policy makers have trouble navigating.

Sources of funding

There are four sources that provide the funding for childcare.

- 1) Parent Tuition – Largest and primary source
- 2) Public Support (block grant, Head Start funding (federal), byzantine collection of homeless childcare programs, other specialized programs, Medicaid, TANF, etc.) – Complicated but relatively large, still not as large as parent tuition
- 3) Leaning on the Child Care Providers – Early childcare providers earn substantially less than if they were in the public system, most also lack benefits, most also have to participate in fundraising activities. *Support: Workforce Study*
- 4) Private Investments – municipal governments, United Way, churches, grants, employers investing in childcare via cafeteria programs (employer support is not yet quantified)

International Programs

The director of the human development program at Cornell says that you can't compare US family services to those in developed countries. The U.S. is more accurately compared to developing countries because of our lack of a cultural commitment to supporting all our children. Cheryl chose to discuss the childcare systems in four developed countries.

FRANCE

Pros:

- Free preschool for 3 – 5 year olds, 100 % participation
- Free creches for infants and toddlers
- Six hours of care between 8am and 4pm. 2 hours in the middle of the day when ½ of children go home for lunch (because parents also go home from work for lunch)
- Intermeshed with the health system (outreach programs stemming from a belief that the early years are the formative ones for positive physical and mental health, incentives to parents to choose high quality care, outpatient nurses whose job it is to reach out to childcare homes as well as families)
- Developed with a clear purpose: to promote French culture
- Has bipartisan support.
- Higher Teacher Salaries and enhanced supports for lower-income census tracts.
- One model, national standards, national curriculum

- Teachers
 - All trained at University programs (start teaching with our equivalent of an MA)
 - Paid for by national government
 - A well respected profession
 - Highly competitive to get into the University
 - Guaranteed a job after graduation
 - Guaranteed wages and benefits comparable to K-12 teachers
 - Receive ongoing training and support

Cons:

- Services for children special needs may not be as good as US
- Family engagement not as robust as parents say they trust the teachers so much
- Complicated by current immigration issues (Syrian wars, ethnic strife) (*This is also true for Italy*)
- High child teacher ratios (1 teacher, 20 4-year-olds, 1 assistant)

Wraparound services are Municipally funded and include a sliding scale based on family income, with a cap)

- Staff who feed children in the middle of the day
- Care for parents who can't make it home by 4pm.
- Summer care (though the French get 4 weeks of vacation, some of which is required)
- Intermeshes with municipal recreation centers that also provide support for families

This policy is viable in France because they have a strong pro-family policy that includes much of what a family needs (access to childcare, housing, vacation etc.).

FINLAND

Finland's children perform better on academic tests than any others in the world. Like Vermont they have a fairly white homogenous demographic, in a cold climate. They also have a byzantine system with many offerings for parents. Their commitment to childcare started when they realized they needed a younger generation to take care of the older generation. They were, therefore, willing to make investments in babies. Similarly, Vermont has declining rates of births, increasing number of 25-45 year olds leaving the state to find work. Unlike Vermont, Finland's income gap is almost negligible.

- Kids don't start public school until age 7
- No homework
- Play based curriculum, promotes learning to learn, not rote skills
- Free preschool for 6 year olds – almost 100% participation
- Byzantine system focuses on family choice (child allowances, paid maternal, paternal, and parental leaves, paid to stay at home, can take same amount and pay a private childcare provider or pay for in home care)
- Philosophy: We want supported workers and supported parents. Nurturing parents promotes a strong workforce attachment.

- National standards
- National curriculum
- Wraparound services, paid for via sliding scale, focus on health, prevention, and well-being, typically delivered via leisure centers where families can get access to services and support

SOUTH KOREA

South Korea underwent a huge cultural shift very fast. Ten years ago, if you were an unwed mother who gave birth, your child did not “exist” - they couldn’t register for school and couldn’t access services. South Korea still subscribed to a Confucian system where the man is head of household and only he can register the child etc. Many single mothers were forced to put babies up for adoption. It was a huge industry that adoption agencies did not discourage. Concerned about being sanctioned for violating human rights, the ministry of gender equity decided they needed to make sure all kids whose parents wanted them to stay here could stay in the country and have access to services. Interestingly Korea looked at Vermont, because at the time there was no enforced child support in Korea. Over the course of 10 years they had lots of dialogue. They needed parent child centers, a system of child support, prevention services, teen parent education programs so young single women could finish high school, and a transformation of the adoption agencies into family support agencies. All of this was accomplished very quickly.

Their current system has high parental tuition – with parents spending huge amounts of money enriching children’s lives. The pressure is unbelievably high to do well. Children spend time in tutoring programs and are assessed by testing programs. Access to higher education is determined by tests. They haven’t necessarily been successful in getting young working age women to have children –many still prefer jobs to children. However, they were able to turn their rigid system around in a very short amount of time by committing to equality and support.

ITALY – Reggio Emilia Model

The Reggio Emilia model was developed after the war when the area was totally devastated. The community said “we never want fascism to get a toe hold in our community again.” The model is a wonderful child-supported child-centered program based on the philosophy that all children are born as creative, independent thinkers. It aims to provide scaffolding for children’s initial excitement about learning. There is a strong emphasis on arts, movement, music, food, and using the entire environment of community as the learning center. Children are often out and about interacting with other adults in the community. Teachers aim to nurture independent thinking and encourage project-based learning, watching what the child is innately interested in and gently guiding them to expand their skills.

The model is well supported by a national teacher training program. All Italian teachers have access to the same program. Teaching salaries and benefits are paid by the municipality. Teachers enter the field with less training than in France (roughly equivalent of our AA degree) but are constantly mentored by a “pedagogista” whose job is to nurture and bring forth the skills of the work force. It’s a great example of successfully delivering continuous and place based quality improvement.

Special Topics

Childcare models

Vermont has many childcare models (Montessori, Waldorf, SummerHill, home-school etc.), but we haven't had the conversation about which models are most effective for which children, it is purely parent choice.

David Rubel: How do children who go through these different models perform when they enter public school programs?

Cheryl: I don't know- I'd be fascinated to know. Are we tracking this? How do we measure success: Test scores, child or family stress levels, creativity, doing well in the community?

Special Education

Michelle Fay: Do we know about the rates of special education in these other countries?

Cheryl: France has an integrated curriculum. Children with special needs don't experience a big change when entering public school. Kids are in the classroom, not being held back or needing aids as often as U.S. children. They address it through teacher training – how do we help our teachers respond to the needs of our kids. In Finland, teachers sit back and watch, stepping in subtly to ensure each kid does well in that setting. Teachers are highly trained observers and able to adapt spaces and approaches to individual children. In Vermont, Special Ed is a huge driver of education costs. We've tried to solve by individual aid, but it might be more cost-effective to nurture skill across the board.

Tax Base

U.S. says we can't do anything here because we don't have the tax base to do it. Other countries depend on higher tax base to fund these services. BUT – though it is true they are paying SOMEWHAT higher taxes, when you look at what they are getting in exchange, they are paying LESS out of pocket. People might be willing to increase taxes when they see what they get back – healthcare, childcare, affordable housing, higher education.

Vermont has been successful at effective transformations

- After hurricane Irene – rebuilding roads, rebuilding bridges, getting people back in homes. We came together and said we WANT to do this, we need to do this, and we got emergency funds. The investment had long term impact – now we do transportation differently.
- Long Term Care. It used to mean you went into a nursing home – most weren't very good, were very expensive, and were funded by Medicaid and private pay. We weren't giving people what they wanted. They wanted to stay at home with wraparound services. We put together incentives to close nursing homes, we asked elders what they wanted (they needed transportation, and people coming to them). We did it effectively and it didn't take too long. Took a big clunky system and transformed it.
- Turning around a failing agriculture economy. We were losing farms at 10% per year. Sustainable jobs movement looked at agricultural transformation. Branding, strong infusions of grant money, consumer education. Proliferation of more individual farms. Strong sense of pride in farms, integrating networks and bringing people together.

Questions to Consider

- What's the philosophy or goal of program? Work force attachment, high quality care for kids, two generation work force?
- How does it meet needs of children? Do we have a family policy? How do we meet needs of parents? Maternal leave? Paternal leave? Sliding scales? Home based allowances?
- What's the relationship between healthcare, education, municipal programs?
- Can you braid together resources that might be available? We rely too heavily on parents. We need to create a simpler transparent model for families, legislature, people who pay taxes.
- Tax code based or annual budget? Every year there is a fight about increasing CCFAP by a modest amount. No cost of living increase built into it. Has a cliff (families start doing well but then stop receiving it). Embedded tax codes are invisible. Could we embed more? Not decoupling – but enhancing what federal government already does...
- How are teachers trained and compensated? In France – nationally trained, nationally compensated. Could we get closer to that here in VT? Could we do a better job? We're doing it well for the public system – but not the private system.
- Who pays for it? In Finland they provide facilities and contract with private entities for the services.
- Could we have peer family groups be more engaged in assessing child care centers?
- Christine Gibson: In Shoreham there are five 3-year olds. How do France/Italy etc. deal with micro communities? Cheryl: Stronger local municipalities. A belief that groups can come together and do things locally. Finland many kids living in rural settings.
- Steve Lambrecht –Are we assuming that paying for early quality childcare will provide the outcomes we seek? Cheryl: Brain development research says yes, especially for lower income children. For children who have high quality settings in their formative years, gains made are not just academic but also in the social/emotional realm. Kids who don't have exposure to books, words, family time are less literate and more likely to end up in jail. Investing in the early years rather than when children are older means investing less and getting more gains over time. Upfront costs are required to save on investments.
- Chloe Leary – Many of the universal systems deal with ages 3-6, does anyone have universal birth to five? Cheryl: Reggio worth exploring, infant schools in England worth exploring. International models assume parents will be home with kids – will have maternal/paternal/parental leave. Employers will pay wages.
 - US was late to join UNESCO. Theme was education from birth. Most developed nations have some kind of a system – options for families to remain home with children without financial burden. For those families who want to be working – Italy has nests. After WWII, European countries lost their male work force – women had to work and they demanded good child care support. During World War II US had GREAT childcare.
- What is our SOCIAL CONTRACT? Do we make a social commitment – do we support it? VT does not have clearly articulated family policy – we came up with something but only for moms on welfare (we owe you healthcare, funding for childcare, training and education, you are expected to work 20 hrs week and learn parenting skills). Never a broad reaching policy. Most developed countries have a family policy (Australia's very good).

- Do we invest in communities where we have higher rates of poverty? Or provide all services universally. Vermont does not have CONCENTRATED poverty – has dispersed poverty. Municipalities with higher rates of poverty but not neighborhoods.