State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Task Force to Study the Comprehensive Needs of Children in the State

MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2024

3:00 PM VIA ZOOM AND YOUTUBE LIVE

Members in Attendance:

Dr. Alicia Roy, Retired Educator, Formerly Principal, North Canaan Elementary School, Co-Chair

Dr. Christopher Trombly, Interim Dean, Southern CT State University, Co-Chair

Christine Velasquez, Health Program Associate, Department of Public Health

Jennifer Jones, Education Consultant, Office of Early Childhood

Tanya Hughes, Esq., Executive Director, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities

Katie Durand, Housing Specialist, CT Department of Housing

Tracy Duran, Program Manager, Clinical & Educational Services, Judicial Branch

Anne Marie Cullinan, Cheshire Board of Education and Education Consultant

Dr. Linda Dixon, Transitional Supports & Success Administrator, Department of Children and Families

The meeting was called to order at 3:06 p.m. by Co-Chair Dr. Alicia Roy.

Dr. Roy noted that both Mark Polzella and Alice Forrester would be absent.

Co-Chair Dr. Christopher Trombly mentioned that the legislature is aware the committee will not convene permanently, but it has been tasked with additional responsibilities per PA 23-101, Sec. 15.

Introductions were made among the members.

Dr. Roy shared her screen to display the agenda, starting with a review of the two new charges outlined in the legislation. The first charge is to review and analyze the effectiveness of programs that assist children and families using federal funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), and the

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Based on this analysis, the committee will make recommendations on which programs should receive permanent state funding.

Dr. Roy reviewed a chart available on Google Drive related to PA 22-27, detailing allocations by agency, implementation status, and ongoing costs.

Dr. Trombly acknowledged that the information on the chart might be incomplete but is a good starting point. He recalled that the Appropriations Chairs were particularly keen to learn the outcomes of ARPA expenditures during the 2024 legislative session. He also mentioned that the Office of Policy and Management had been contacted to gather additional information. Task force members from state agencies were asked to inquire within their respective departments about allocated funds and their distribution.

Dr. Roy shared a personal story about a middle school student who tragically committed suicide despite showing no warning signs. She shared this to emphasize the importance of the services being discussed. She also referenced recent comments by the Attorney General, who expressed concern about the physical and mental health of children.

Christine Velasquez inquired about the origin of the task force's list of programs. Task force staff member Taylor Aitken, who also serves as Clerk of the Appropriations Committee, explained that the list originated from the House Democrats Office, tracking federal fund expenditures, especially in relation to PA 22-47 and ARPA funds.

Dr. Roy read aloud the second task: conducting a needs assessment for children, identifying gaps between current conditions and desired outcomes, particularly those resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus will be on students who graduated between 2020 and 2023.

Katie Durand asked if the columns in the spreadsheet were sufficient for their inquiries within their agencies or if additional information should be requested. Ds. Roy suggested that including an explanation of the funds' allocation, program results, and ongoing status would enhance the report.

Dr. Trombly expressed concerns about the legislation's narrow focus on graduates from 2020 to 2023. He suggested gathering more comprehensive data, mentioning the School Counselor Association as a possible source. Though uncertain about how much data is tracked, he felt it could be a good starting point to see trends in education, employment, etc. He also proposed using data from colleges and potentially implementing focus groups. Additionally, Dr. Trombly mentioned that feedback from teenagers in the Connecticut Association of Schools had been valuable when discussing school start times. He encouraged further suggestions from the group and mentioned organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs, United Way, and DOMUS as potential data sources.

Anne Marie Cullinan recommended reaching out to the State Department of Education's Adult Education Consultant to track students who attended Adult Education or obtained General Education Diplomas that have yet to graduate. Dr. Trombly agreed, noting it was a strong idea.

Dr. Roy supported expanding data collection beyond the years specified in the legislation, arguing that the pandemic affected children across all age groups. She noted her school shares a part-time social worker with a neighboring school, which has proven to be an invaluable resource for students, even on a limited basis. Dr. Trombly agreed that this would provide important qualitative data.

Tanya Hughes shared information about the CHRO's Kids Court Academy Program, which began during the pandemic for middle and high school students, meeting bi-weekly. Although no qualitative data had been captured, the program provided a platform for students to express themselves and introduced them to social justice. Ms. Hughes will consult with her team to see if any data is available. Ds. Roy and Dr. Trombly agreed that even basic data, such as participation numbers or observed trends, would be useful.

Dr. Trombly mentioned that qualitative information from school counselors could also provide insight into behavioral changes and family struggles since the pandemic.

Ms. Velasquez said that the Department of Public Health (DPH) had distributed $12 million from the CDC Crisis Cooperative Agreement Grant through school-based health centers and had started processing the data. An additional $10 million from ARPA funds was also being distributed, but data on this was currently limited to how many schools were reached. She emphasized that this funding had increased services but was temporary. DPH is working with a data analyst to report on this, and Ms. Velasquez noted that narratives from the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant could be helpful for the report.

Dr. Roy emphasized the importance of data, both quantitative and anecdotal, for the report.

Dr. Trombly calculated that $10 million, when divided among the 350,000 school-aged children in the state, equates to only $28 per student. Ms. Velasquez added that the funding targeted specific communities and noted that one year of funding was not enough to solve the problems.

Dr. Roy went over the schedule for upcoming virtual meetings, with the next one set for Wednesday, October 2, 2024, at 3:00 p.m. She encouraged members to share any useful information for the report, even if they could not attend future meetings.

Ms. Velasquez asked if data should be emailed to the Co-Chairs. Dr. Trombly confirmed that email was fine and mentioned the task force would continue to use the shared Google folder.

Dr. Roy suggested contacting Irene Parisi at the State Department of Education (SDE), and Dr. Trombly confirmed they would follow up. She then asked Linda Dixon about DCF's fund management. Dr. Dixon explained that most of the funds had been allocated to mental health services quickly and were documented in spreadsheets, which she would share with the group.

Ms. Cullinan offered to reach out to Adult Education services for additional data, which the Co-Chairs agreed would be helpful.

Jennifer Jones noted that the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was not included in the existing spreadsheets but said she would gather relevant ARPA data to share with the task force.

Dr. Trombly reiterated that the required data likely exists within the agencies and simply needs to be compiled. The Co-Chairs thanked everyone for their time and contributions.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:48 p.m.