

First 5 Solano Children and Families Commission

Minutes of Retreat – Saturday, October 18, 2008, 9:00 AM Joseph Nelson Community Center 611 Village Drive, Suisun City, CA

Attendance

Commissioners: Dr. Sharon Tucker, Chair; Norma Thigpen, Vice-chair; Dee Alarcón; Dan Ayala; Stephan Betz; Sheryl Fairchild, Debbie Gossell, Barbara Kondylis, Dr. Elaine Norinsky.

Staff/Public: Commission staff and approximately ten members of the public were present.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at: 9:13 AM by Chairperson Tucker.

I. Greetings, Introductions, Public Comment, Adopt Retreat Agenda

Commissioners and staff introduced themselves.

Dr. Cheryl Lynn de Werff of the Solano County Office of Education (SCOE) informed the Commission that high quality child care continues to be a concern for families in Solano County. Some of the achievements of the Preschool for All (PFA) workgroup are: coordinating 21 local agencies to implement the PFA plan; increasing workforce development for child care providers and preschool teachers; sponsoring pre-kindergarten articulation meetings to help ease transition for children from preschool to kindergarten and developing a plan to implement a licensed family child care preschool network amongst care providers.

Lisette Estrella-Henderson from SCOE informed the Commission that the PFA workgroup is building foundations to implement the PFA plan. She asked First 5 Solano to take the next steps as a partner in the PFA plan.

Janice Adams from the Benicia Unified School District (BUSD) thanked the First 5 Solano Commission for the work they do on behalf of the children of Solano County. Ms. Adams informed the Commission that a facility is available in Benicia to start a preschool under the PFA plan, but there is a lack of funding. If the BUSD can obtain start up funding, they are ready to open a preschool.

Sharon Coleman from the Solano County Licensed Family Child Care Association (SCLFCCA) has been a part of the PFA workgroup since 2005. Ms. Coleman would like to form a network of home-based child care programs in Solano County to establish high quality providers that can provide home preschool. She would also like to target neighborhoods that have over 3500 children on the waiting list for subsidized child care.

Debbie Peralez from Child Start, Inc. informed the Commission that the two Head Start sites in the County currently funded by First 5 Solano have a combined total of over 300 families on the waiting list for those two sites alone.

Commissioner Alarcón moved to approve the October 18, 2008 agenda. The motion passed

unanimously.

II. Annual Review of First 5 Solano Strategic Plan

Steven LaFrance, principal of LFA Group, reviewed the PowerPoint presentation for the Strategic Plan review.

Commissioner Kondylis commented that she is concerned that even though First 5 Solano is helping children enter school fully prepared, they might lose their momentum and slip through the cracks once they enter first grade and on. She is interested in forming partnerships to ensure this does not happen.

Christina Arrostituto, Executive Director for First 5 Solano, commented that a good time to look at items like this would be when the current contracts hit their three-year-mark.

Commissioner Betz informed the Commission that a "Response to Intervention" program is currently being implemented in schools. He would prefer to have a First 5 Solano/Solano County Mental Health joint RFP include the "Response-to-Intervention" program.

Commissioner Tucker asked about the nature and/or definition of the achievement gap. Commissioner Alarcón commented the achievement gap will be addressed at the next local summit. Also, the "Response-to-Intervention" program is geared toward all students, including gifted students who have been left behind. It helps all students with their success in school

III. Program Investment Plan Review

A. Status of current initiatives

Michele Harris, Deputy Director for First 5 Solano, reviewed the PowerPoint presentation for this piece.

The Commission discussed the amounts and percentages of funds that were designated for contracted programs and went unspent. Commissioner Tucker commented that there is no reason the Commission should not be spending the unspent funds the same fiscal year they go unspent. Commissioners should stay tuned in to this each year and ensure agencies are not requesting more money than they can spend.

The Commission took a short break at 10:25 AM and reconvened at 10:39 AM.

B. Fiscal leveraging opportunities

Ms. Harris reviewed the PowerPoint presentation for this agenda item.

Commissioner Betz commented that it is hard for health and mental health providers to maintain service levels without stable funding streams. It is difficult for agencies to structure staff by caseload numbers. It would behoove the County to maintain a steady funding stream for these service providers. First 5 Solano should consider putting language into its contracts that funded agencies are required to have a "floor" of committed funds from other sources.

Commissioner Kondylis commented that maybe the Solano County Board of Supervisors should consider funding cycles instead of year to year contracts to give non-profits more stable funding sources.

The Commission directed staff to report back on the cost per slot for full-day Head Start programs.

Nancy Calvo of Solano County Health and Social Services suggested that the Commission

consider "rolling over" unspent contracted funds to the next fiscal year and keep them designated for the same contract or agency. The agency could plan for how to spend those unspent funds in the next fiscal year. These funds could be used in addition to the funds already designated for the fiscal year.

Christina Arrostuto, Executive Director, commented that a challenge to "rolling over" funds is not only undocumented changes in scopes of services but also "growing the program", so that by the time the funding cycle ends, the program to be re-authorized is considerably larger than the one originally proposed. The Commission currently deals with requests to move funds from one year to the next on a case-by-case basis, as a reallocation, so that the Commission is approving changes in scopes of work and contract amendments can be supported.

Commissioner Betz commented that First 5 Solano currently has a working mechanism in place for unspent funds, and he thinks we need to keep that in place. Funds should not be rolled over automatically, but grantee requests are considered when they have a specific plan for the unspent funds.

IV. Environmental Scan

A. Relevant data

Mr. LaFrance reviewed the PowerPoint presentation for this agenda item.

Commissioner Kondylis commented that, from a system perspective, looking at all the partners (not just First 5 Solano), and services currently being provided are slightly disjointed. Pieces are being done, but it's not a complete system.

Commissioner Tucker commented that the data provided doesn't show the Commission what people currently have that they value the most. That is also important to know.

B. Challenges

Commissioner Betz informed the Commission that CalWORKs recipients have not received a cost-of-living increase in fifteen years. Families on CalWORKs are trying to survive on the same amount of money that was received fifteen years ago, and it is not working.

Kim Thomas of the Children's Network informed the Commission that there are a lot of families coming in to the Family Resource Centers that have never needed help before now. A lot of families that were considered middle-class are now facing huge economic challenges.

Ana Dineen of the FSUSD Family Resource Center at Anna Kyle Elementary School informed the Commission that funding received through Targeted Case Management (TCM) funding has been drastically reduced. There is also a sunset date of April 30th, 2009 for school-based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA) funding. FSUSD received \$60,000 from these funding sources last year, so this is a huge cut for school districts.

C. Opportunities for expanded investment

Ms. Arrostuto reviewed the PowerPoint presentation for this agenda item. She informed the Commission that they will be asked to consider raising the match rate for EPSDT to fifteen percent, beginning this fiscal year. The exact amount needed will not be known until after the mid-year contracts are finalized. Also, H&SS has been awarded a five million dollar grant that is disbursed as \$1.3 million each year over five years. This provides funding for everything except public health nurses, which are needed to provide the services. One possibility is to look at funding those public health nurses.

Ms. Calvo suggested the Commission consider funding a “social marketing campaign” on changing behaviors in the community. This would be a good way to discover the reasons women aren’t getting prenatal care and target those populations to increase the amount of women getting early prenatal care. This would cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

Commissioner Kondylis informed the Commission that recent studies indicate that placing a fan in infant’s rooms can help lower the risk of SIDS. The Commission could consider making fans a part of the Kit for New Parents.

V. Long-Term Financial Plan Update

Mike Smith, the retreat facilitator, reviewed the PowerPoint presentation for this item.

There is about \$5.4 million available in the LTFP that was not anticipated at this time in the life of the Plan. The first thing discussed by the Commissioners was whether to do nothing about this, which would effectively lengthen the life of the Plan by about two fiscal years (to FY2017/18). Part of this discussion centered around the fact that First 5s are seen as targets for backfilling the state budget gaps in children’s services because of already-large amounts held in reserve. There is a general lack of understanding that most of these funds are obligated to long-term contracts for services; they “look available”.

Commissioner Betz commented that, with this “new” money, the state can only borrow against funds that are not obligated already. If First 5 Solano doesn’t obligate its funds, then the state might be able (and would most likely try) to “take” them. The Executive Director commented that, while the Commission’s dedication to long-term community sustainability was appropriate and laudable, these “extra” funds could more appropriately be utilized to address current community needs. Commissioners eventually expressed a preference for deploying some or all of these dollars rather than “saving” them.

Staff then presented a variety of information about potential ways to deploy this additional funding. The three sets of information included:

- A review of the Strategic Plan Update section in which Commissioners listed possible areas of future funding, should funds become available;
- A review by the Evaluator of community-level data trends that had shown movement since the Strategic Plan was updated; and
- Areas identified by staff as “critical gaps” in existing funding.

The Commission discussed raising the Discretionary Fund back to its full allocation of \$250,000 per fiscal year, which could be used for items like mini grants, one-time funding and priority issues that emerge during funding cycles. Staff would bring proposals to the Commission annually for deployment of the Discretionary Fund.

The Commission also discussed funding more services for “gap kids” (children who are in need of mental health services but are not Medi-Cal eligible) through the Early Childhood Developmental Health (ECDH) program.

The Commissioners had a favorable response to fully funding the discretionary fund and expanding the capacity of existing contracts. They expressed a desire to have a more in-depth discussion regarding funding services for ECDH “gap kids” at a later date.

Commissioner Betz supported Ms. Arrostuto’s request to explore with the Family Resource Centers their views regarding critical service gaps in addition to the ones brought forward by staff (which were: expanding funding to include Cleo Gordon FRC and increased funding for Benicia FRC (for a full FTE) and Vallejo FRCs (to meet intensive case management needs).

Commissioner Tucker was interested in considering funding for programs that already have a high success rate. Commissioner Betz asked staff to take a critical look at the terms of the programs' success first, and Commissioner Tucker agreed with him.

Commissioner Kondylis suggested that if grantees have not been able to meet their target goals because their funding levels from other places have gone down, the Commission could consider raising our funding levels to help the programs come back up and meet their goals. Commissioner Betz was interested in looking at this within the confines of not supplanting any funding.

Dr. Tam Stevenson, attending the meeting on behalf of the Solano County H&SS Maternal Child and Adolescent Health Bureau advisory board, informed the Commission that Solano County is the only county in California that has a component that matches the 0-5 Mental Health Services Act money with First 5 dollars. She requested that the Commission put an emphasis on the age "zero to three" population and on collaborations between agencies.

Commissioners expressed their preferences for top priorities for expanded funding via "dot voting" on suggested areas for expanding investments. The Commission directed staff to bring back a matrix these priorities and their criteria for considering expanded funding. Commissioners further directed that this information and process go through the full Commission, not through a Committee.

VI. Next Steps and Commissioner Remarks

Commissioner Betz commented that he appreciated the great, concise process today. He will not be able to attend the Commission meeting in December.

Commissioner Alarcón complimented the facilitator, Mike Smith, and the staff on the process today. The process got the Commission to exactly where they need to be. She will also not be able to attend the December meeting.

Commissioner Gossell thanked the First 5 Solano grantees for providing the information that helped the Commission reach their decisions today.

Commissioner Thigpen thanked the staff, grantees and Commissioners for making this a very productive day.

Commissioner Ayala complimented Mike Smith on his facilitating and thanked the grantees for all the useful information provided.

Commissioner Fairchild thanked the grantees for attending this Saturday meeting and complimented staff and LFA Group on the clear and easily-understood information provided.

Commissioner Norinsky commented that she learned a lot today. The issues the Commission looked at were larger than just funding issues. She thought these issues are not really resolved with just money, that some involve changing of attitudes.

Commissioner Kondylis commented that she agreed with everyone else's remarks and complimented Mike Smith on his facilitating.

Commissioner Tucker thanked staff, grantees and Mike Smith. She also thanked the Commissioners for their great spirit and respect for each other. She commented that she feels lucky and thankful to have them on the Commission.

VII. Future Agenda Items, Meeting Time/Date/Location

The next regularly-scheduled Commission meeting will be held on December 2, 2008 at 5:30 PM, Multi-Purpose Room at 2101 Courage Drive, Fairfield, CA 94533. Future agenda items include: Long Term Financial Plan Update, Program Investment Plan Update, Election of 2009 Officers and Annual Report to the Community and 2009 Calendar.

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 PM.


Heather Devaney, Administrative Secretary

Approved:  Dec. 2, 2008