



## **UPDATE: Summary of March 17, 2016 Meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission**

In its March meeting, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care (BRC) agreed on an operational definition of high quality early care and education, and discussed the cost drivers within that definition as well as the components of quality affected by economies of scale.

### **Definition of High-Quality Early Care and Education**

The commission began with an in-depth discussion on the definition of high-quality early care and education drafted by a subcommittee of Commissioners Paul Behrman, Laurel Bongiorno and Reeva Murphy. The subcommittee's definition, based on several national models—Federal Head Start monitoring protocol, National Association for the Education of Young Children standards, STep Ahead Recognition System and National Association for Family Child Care—encompasses four areas:

1. Child Health & Safety
2. Early Care, Education and Child Development
3. Family and Community Engagement
4. Leadership and Management Systems

The commission recognized that the definition needed to align with the state's quality recognition system and emphasized that this definition was created solely for the purpose of calculating the cost of bringing high-quality care and education to scale. The commission affirmed that this definition should not impact Vermont's current STARS system and should not be considered a mandate on quality for providers.

Following audience input, commissioners reached a consensus on the definition of high-quality early care and education, and agreed to vote to approve the definition in the April meeting following additional language clarification.

### **Cost Drivers in Quality Definition and Economies of Scale**

Commissioner Reeva Murphy, deputy commissioner for the Vermont Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division, presented to the commission the cost drivers for early childhood education programs within the established definition of high-quality care early care and education. Murphy said that the main cost drivers for a program of any size were personnel wages and benefits and professional development. Other cost drivers included occupancy, food and supplies, and administration costs. To achieve economies of scale, she cited 3 cost drivers that may be more achievable and/or affordable when shared among small programs:

- Wages and benefits for support staff

- Professional development
- Transportation

There was considerable discussion of the transportation challenges families face in getting access to high-quality care and how it's an important, but expensive, part of the solution.

Murphy said the benefits of providing transportation are great, but that not many programs can afford to provide it. "When you are able to provide transportation, it increases the ability to reach kids with special needs, foster kids, and kids with parents with special needs who can't drive," said Murphy.

The commission also discussed how the benefits cliff in the current system was negatively affecting children whose parents can't afford to pay child care copays. Murphy talked about the "middle band" of underserved families—those who earn too much to receive significant financial assistance but not enough to afford quality care. She encouraged the commission to consider how to change the system to give the underserved access to high-quality care. "In Vermont, we touch the most vulnerable in a really deep way, but that band above them is lost," Murphy said.

Commissioner Paul Behrman, director at Champlain Valley Head Start, said the BRC should not confine its thinking to the prevalent model just because that's what currently exists. "Can you imagine if society said 'we won't take care of kids until 4th grade—up until 4th grade, kids and families have to fend for themselves'? That's essentially what we've done with kids from birth to five."

Commissioner Chloe Leary, executive director of Winston Prouty Center for Child Development, said she is interested in hearing from families to know what they think about the affordability of high-quality child care and education. The commission agreed that it would be beneficial to receive input from families at a future meeting.

The commission's next meeting will be Thursday, April 28, 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. in the Fourth Floor Conference Room of the Pavilion Office Building in Montpelier, and will focus on affordability of high-quality care and education, and determining what such a system should look like by reviewing multiple models. This meeting was rescheduled from April 21 to accommodate commissioners whose children will be on school vacation.