



## **UPDATE: Summary of May 19, 2016 Meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission**

In its May meeting, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care (BRC) heard an in-depth report comparing US and international child care system financing policies and reviewed the timeline and expectations for an independent consulting group as well as the remaining questions to be answered by the commission.

The meeting opened with an introduction of Jessica Blackman, the new administrator of the BRC, and Lieutenant Colonel Steven Lambrecht, who will be replacing soon-to-be deployed Colonel Luke Ahmann as the military-parent representative on the commission.

### **US vs. International Child Care Financing Policies**

Dr. Cheryl Mitchell, early childhood education expert and former deputy secretary of the Agency of Human Services, presented to the commission a detailed review of four unique international child care financing systems in comparison to Vermont and US financing systems. Mitchell began by listing the “four main buckets” of funding for the Vermont child care system:

- Parent tuition
- Public support
- Leaning on the early care workforce
- Private investments

Mitchell described the parent-tuition bucket as the primary source of funding. “We depend too heavily on parents to pay for child care,” said Mitchell. And yet, referring to the third source of funding—leaning on the early care workforce—Mitchell acknowledged that child care providers don’t earn enough, saying, “there are child care teachers with college degrees who are earning substantially less than they would be if they worked in the public school system.”

The four international models Mitchell presented for comparison were France, Finland, South Korea and the Reggio Emilia approach developed in Italy. Mitchell discussed the unique qualities of each child care system:

- Finland’s laid back approach: children don’t start school until they are 7 years old
- South Korea’s more rigid, high-pressure system: Mitchell highlighted South Korea because of the country’s ability to completely transform its child care system within 10 years
- France’s family-centric system: 6 hours of child care are provided to parents, with 2 hours off in the middle of the day to allow children to have lunch with their parents at home

- Reggio Emilia: its main philosophy is to encourage children to be creative, independent thinkers and was described by Mitchell as “the most wonderful, beautiful, child-supported place that many of us have ever seen.”

Each system was unique, though Mitchell said the common trait among them was early learning and care’s place as part of a much larger system based on a community-focused philosophy of supporting children, families and teachers; a system that includes public funding for parent and teacher training, health care, family leave, substantial time off and higher education. In addition, each country offers additional wrap-around services paid for on a sliding-scale with capped limits based on family income.

Mitchell cited studies that have shown children do better in life if their teachers are more highly trained and compensated, that the quality of a child’s environment positively affects the child’s life and that brain development in high-quality settings save health costs later in life, to which Commissioner Lambrecht said the gains achieved and the savings would be a selling point for public funding of high-quality child care.

Commissioner Paul Dragon, director of policy and program integration at the Agency of Human Services said, “When I think about other social services the state provides—like Dr. Dynasaur—I think ‘how come we have not put a priority on child care?’”

Commissioner David Rubel from Community National Bank said, “It’s wonderful to hear these different models in other countries. I’m curious about what nontraditional [funding and program] models we have in Vermont that we can draw upon for what we do in Vermont.” Now that the commission has heard about the rest of the world, Rubel wondered, “what we can learn from Vermont?”

Following the robust discussion of Mitchell’s report, the commission talked briefly with representatives from Public Consulting Group (PCG) regarding its project to investigate current funding and long-term financing options for high-quality, early child care and education programs in Vermont. The commission agreed to send PCG relevant reports and studies from Vermont and to assign a subcommittee to work with PCG before the next meeting to review the project plan, including tasks, proposed dates for July and August community forums, key deliverables, timelines and milestones. PCG will be presenting their plan at the June 16 meeting of the BRC.

The commission’s next meeting will be Thursday, June 16, 10 AM – 12:30 PM in the Fourth Floor Conference Room of the Pavilion Office Building in Montpelier.