



# Minutes

Provider Services Committee Meeting  
January 14, 2010; 1:00 p.m.  
St. James Children's Center, Islamorada, FL

**Committee Attendees:** Gina Cortes-Suarez, Ed.D; Silvia La Villa, Ed.D; Danny Armstrong Ph.D; Connie Chapell

**Committee Absentees:**

**Staff Attendees:** Alina Soto; Mary Williams; Trina Rodriguez; Amber Eby; Blythe Robinson

**General Attendees:** Kathy Snyder, WHFS; Laurie Dunn, WHFS; Nilda Bernaldez, Providers Association; Katie Pearce, St. Justin Martyr Preschool; Jorge Barrios, Dolphin Montessori; Bridget Dangel, Montessori Academy; Xiomara Almeida, YMCA Key Largo; Sylvie Turner, Montessori Island School-Tavernier; Sue Ellen Bennett, St. James Children's Center; Kerry Cosme, YMCA Key Largo; Christine Patterson, Inez Martin CDC; Susan DeMonch, Banana Cabanna Academy; Edith Humes, Miami-Dade County; Barbara Rogers, Community Co-Op Preschool in Marathon; Jeanne Cisco, Lighthouse Academy of Key West; Doug Blomberg, WHFS; Linda Carmona-Sanchez, AECE (attended via conference call)

## I. Welcome and Introductions

Gina Cortes-Suarez, Ed.D.

- G. Cortes-Suarez welcomed everyone to the Provider Services Committee meeting.

## II. Approval of Minutes

Gina Cortes-Suarez, Ed.D.

- S. La Villa moved to approve the minutes from September 9, 2009.
- Motion seconded by C. Chapell
- Motion unanimously passed.

## III. Early Learning Coalition Report

Evelio C. Torres, CEO

- E. Torres stated the VPK program is serving more children today than they have ever served. They are looking at over 20,000 children being served between Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. The bad news is that the state is running a deficit for VPK. They are extremely concerned that they are going to see another reduction in the per student allocation for VPK. They are working very hard, meeting with anyone that has any leverage with these budget issues so they do



not see another reduction. The other concern is the class size. They do not want to see an increase in class size in VPK because they will never be able to get them down again if they go up. It is one of the ways the legislature uses to compensate for paying providers less. This is going to be a session where every voice is going to count. Find out who your legislator is and make sure your voice is heard.

- Another area in which the ELC is doing really well is the CCEP program. The Coalition has more than doubled the expenditures and the number of children being served in the program. There is still some money left they may not be able to utilize in this grant. They have offered the dollars to some other Early Learning Coalitions but right now ELC is looking at half a million dollars that they will not be able to use in Miami-Dade/Monroe.
- The Coalition was also able to provide a rate alignment for Miami-Dade County providers. The last time ELC provided a rate increase, 50% of Miami-Dade County providers were not eligible because their market rate surveys were not updated. They have gone back and updated their market rates and the Board has approved a rate alignment. The Coalition is going to be reviewing rates on a yearly basis. Rate increases are more difficult because it requires additional dollars. They are going back to the Board to find out how much it would cost to provide a rate increase within the next year.
- There are a number of concerns about the budget this year. In terms of what the legislative budget requests between School Readiness and VPK is about \$141 million dollars. That includes \$37.8 million of recurring dollars which they are hoping to get every year for children in the School Readiness program; \$38 million in recurring dollars for the VPK reduction; \$28.2 million dollars for the deficit they are carrying from this year and last year; \$43 million dollars for the projected growth in VPK. They are concerned because the legislative-budget request that AWI has submitted to the governor's office has left out \$38 million dollars for School Readiness. The reason it was left off was because they still have some of the stimulus dollars. The Coalitions across the state think it's a bad idea to leave out the \$38 million. They are including the \$38 million dollars in all their conversations with legislators. The stimulus dollars must be used by the end of next year. The greater concern is the base allocation for School Readiness was drastically reduced.
- L. Carmona stated that when the ARRA dollars go away regardless of whether the \$38 million dollars are cut now or next year, the services are being severely under-funded. E. Torres stated they need to fight very hard to make sure the budget is going to be restored. They are going to continue the advocacy trainings in both Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties. L. Carmona is also planning a trip to Tallahassee with providers from Miami and other parts of the state. The chair of the Early Learning Advisory Council has requested as many providers as possible get together and make sure their voices are heard. C. Chapell suggested getting the parents to help as well.
- One of the issues they have been trying to tackle in Monroe County is providing services for children. They have played around with the idea of creating a special taxing district in Monroe County for children. The biggest hurdle has been finding a leader to take the issue on. It's about funding children's services. It can be done but there needs to be leadership. There is a children's taskforce being



chaired by D. Blomberg. The concern with him chairing the children's taskforce is that he is a provider and it can be seen as self-serving. So there needs to be

someone more neutral. D. Blomberg stated they need to find a champion in their community. D. Lawrence has come down many times to work with some people but he worked a lot behind the scenes to get things done. D. Blomberg is still willing to receive any information that someone may have and wants to continue to move this forward. He stated when they ran the numbers, it would have raised a fund of \$13-\$14 million dollars for only Monroe County but they need to get tax payers to agree to it.

- E. Torres thanked the committee members for joining them at this meeting and for the good job they are doing on the Board. L. Carmona stated she wanted to encourage providers to be much more active and vocal in support of early childhood education. It affects not only their pocketbooks but all of the children and families in the community. Next Tuesday they will be coming down to Monroe to provide six (6)-hour training on transitioning to kindergarten. It's a screening mechanism. It's year-long process that gauges teachers and parents in developing an early childhood passport. It would be used for children going to VPK into kindergarten to see what skills children have mastered. They will be back in February to do it again. The training is courtesy of ELC.

#### IV. Monroe Report

Mary Williams

- M. Williams stated some good news--that the Reading Is Fundamental grant will be funded again in 2010. The first distribution will be in late-April, early-May. They will have a lot of new information and resources. Their target is to serve 1,300 children in the Keys again. There will be three (3) book distributions. She thanked E. Torres and A. Soto. One of the Keys providers, Nancy Vater won the lottery to attend the FACCM Conference in Orlando. She acknowledged the ELC classroom mentors who are working with 15 School Readiness Centers. They have conducted 311 classroom visits and provided ten (10) individual and small group trainings. They are pleased to be offering that as a quality service to the providers of Monroe. Their School Readiness child health screening project's first phase was completed in December. To date they have screened 345 children. There will be another opportunity to screen new children or to cover children that were missed the last time. She appreciates all their cooperation. All of the programs are so receptive. They have also offered the screenings to private-pay children for \$10 as well, and they have a limited fund that allows them to provide some special follow-up care.
- They have now distributed all of the VPK banners to the Monroe providers. As they get new VPK providers, ELC has a supply to provide them with banners as well. The state is looking to update Forms 10 and 11. There was a rules workshop. A lot of people had input on those forms. The point is to streamline the process for providers. She just wanted to give a heads-up that when they start the application process there will be new forms.
- M. Williams stated the Monroe County Transition Team recently got together to apply the Pyramid Model Academy. They put together an application to attend the academy and recently found out they have been accepted to attend. They hope it provides a lot of opportunities for resources and strategies to help meet their needs being faced in the classroom.



#### **V. Wesley House Report**

**Kathy Snyder**

- K. Snyder stated by the end of December there were 690 children enrolled in the School Readiness programs. They have a waiting list of 106 children. They had 29 requests for new child care referrals. They are noticing that a lot of the children they are serving are of a younger age. Of course, the younger children cost more. They are paying more for Gold Seal accredited providers, and parents are making less money which means parent fees are going down. So the reimbursement they are paying is more. They are trying to find solutions of how to use the money more wisely. Wesley House staff is going to be looking at how they can move some of the money around and will meet with the Coalition to see what can be done. The ones hardest hit are the family day care homes. They have lost seven (7) FDCH in the last month and there are seven (7) that don't have any children right now.
- YTD they have served 406 VPK children and have 37 classrooms. The Provider Services Group headed by L. Dunn, has had many trainings: Ages & Stages development screenings, Creative Curriculum, nap-time trainings, loving discipline, managing challenging behaviors, and stress relief. In October, they had the five (5)-hour provider workshop in Marathon where DCF gave an update on the rules and regulations. The provider services staff has conducted 164 technical assistance trainings in the last quarter.
- The Spanish Provider Service Association meets once a month down in the Keys. In October, 26 providers were in attendance and they did observation techniques; In November, 23 providers were in attendance and they did partnerships with parents. In December, 21 providers were in attendance and they did stress relief. They recognize they need to serve all the Spanish providers throughout the Keys. The centers have a lot of Spanish-speaking staff. It is one of the initiatives they have coming soon to provide trainings.

#### **VI. Monroe Provider Association Report**

**Nilda Bernaldez, Provider Association of Florida Keys**

- N. Bernaldez recognized the executive members of the Provider Association of the Florida Keys. She stated she wanted to encourage those who are not members yet to join and become actively involved. Their goal is to raise the standard educational level of their early childhood teachers. They would encourage them to get a degree from FCCPC. Enrollment is ongoing. Classes start on March 16 of this year. There are 35 interested in enrolling in the FCCPC program. They will go around and visit centers to introduce themselves and get more enrollments in the program.

#### **VII. Monroe Goals & Objectives for 2010**

**Gina Cortes-Suarez, Ed.D.**

- G. Cortes-Suarez asked what issues need to be tackled in 2010 in terms of changing or improving things. C. Chapell stated she recently attended a course at the Homestead Air Force Base. The one thing she really got out of it was that the Air Force Base provides wonderful workshops. The lieutenant offered resources and tips for what's available for military families. They are trying to



increase the awareness and support for kids, their families and providers. D. Armstrong stated the Administration on Development Disabilities just funded a project called the Military 360 program which is designed to develop resources for military families with children who have disabilities. The funding just became available last month. Project Brave is another project also available for military families as well.

- M. Williams stated a concern that Florida Keys Community College initiated an early childhood education program last year. They worked for a number of years to get a program there. It is in serious jeopardy due to lack of enrollment. The program is designed for the working early education professional. Unless they support the program, they may lose it.
- G. Cortes-Suarez asked providers to email A. Soto with issues they may think about after the meeting to compose a list. E. Torres stated it's good to have a list of goals and some of the challenges because they can also be used as speaking points for the leadership in the Keys when meeting with them.
- Christine Patterson from Inez Martin commented that a good starting point would be ESOL classes. So many members of the staff are primarily Spanish-speaking. It's a big challenge to encourage them to take college classes. L. Carmona stated this is why they need to promote degreed studies in languages other than English or in addition to English. The families they serve are of minority background with limited English skills. Children learn best in the language in which they are exposed to at home.
- G. Cortes-Suarez thanked Sue Ellen Bennet and St. James for their hospitality and the opportunity to go there.
- L. Carmona commented that while it's important to have Provider Services Meetings in the Keys, it makes it difficult not to have meetings in Miami-Dade as well. Perhaps they need two Provider Services Committees that can meet on a monthly basis and then meet together on a quarterly basis. G. Cortes-Suarez stated they will look into it.

<b>VII. Public Comments</b>	<b>Gina Cortes-Suarez, Ed.D.</b>
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<b>VIII. Adjourn</b>	<b>Gina Cortes-Suarez, Ed.D.</b>
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