

MEETING SUMMARY

Atlanta Early Education Leadership Council Work Session #1

February 28, 2018 | 8:30 am - Noon

After a round of introductions, Stephanie Blank, the chair of the Atlanta Early Education Leadership Council (AEELC) offered the imperative for the group:

- We will be answering the question of how to expose every child to HQ learning environment.
- We will focus on putting early education and k-12 in alignment.
- We will develop strategies to teach parents to be advocates for their children.
- We will create a unified vision that lifts up every child. Everything we do will be through the lens of what's best for our kids.
- We will document plans and share recommendations for programs to be implemented and funded to take kids to the next level.
- Ultimate Goal: to provide access to affordable, high quality early education for every child.

Without human interaction, humans become very stressed. Serve and return concept – interaction. The synapses/ new neural connections in the brain are developed through this process, like the hard wiring of a computer. In the absence of this serve and return, nothing is happening. This impacts everything that happens for a child for the remainder of his or her life. Without this serve and return process, children do not develop properly.

Abuse and neglect impact the brain.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study – single parent homes, living in high crime neighborhoods, domestic violence, poverty, etc. Significant adversity impairs development in the first three years. When a child has over four risk factors, he or she is likely to experience developmental delays.

By 18 months, we can see differences in children's language. We can already predict how children will do in school by the time they are 18 months old.

- The brain's plasticity is best in the early years.
- How do we expose every child to a high quality learning environment?
- High quality early learning is all about the serve and return with children. Early learning is where Atlanta has the opportunity to make a difference and create a legacy for years to come.

Mayor Bottoms addressed the council:

She expressed that education changed the trajectory of her life. She is a mother of four children who all learn very differently. Mayor Bottoms is grateful to be part of this

conversation and she wants to see how the city can fill in the gaps and support the great work those in this room are doing.

The State of Early Care and Learning in Atlanta

Hanah Goldberg, Director of Research for GEEARS, provided data on early education at the city and neighborhood level. A copy of her presentation is included in the Appendix.

Meria Carstarphen, APS superintendent was asked to offer some comments:

A consequence of not investing in children at birth can be seen when they get to school. There are certain issues at the fundamental level, and we have to do a lot of back tracking. We also have an issue of intergenerational poverty, a cycle that's being perpetuated. This cycle is directly related to a lack of HQ ECE. HQ ECE is a key factor in eliminating learning gaps, but we can't do it alone.

Learning from Cities Across the Nation

Tonja Rucker, the Program Director for Early Childhood Success from the National League of Cities (NLC), provided information on what cities across the nation are doing in early education. Noting NLC sees early learning as a continuum, she highlighted efforts in Baltimore, Seattle, Hartford, Orlando, and Chattanooga.

Her initial recommendations included:

- Solid talking points that reflect the importance of the development of the brain can be powerful for local level officials.
- Good entry points for change are early learning, healthcare, safety, housing, and community.
- See early learning as a continuum.

A number of cities and states are making progress on strengthening early childhood. Her examples included:

- Baltimore: Implemented the B-More Initiative, and Pre-School program
- Seattle: provided financial support to the ECE workforce to expand their education
- Hartford: The Alignment Project, including hiring two full time monitors to do ECE training/coaching for the workforce
- Orlando: Paramore Kidz Zone
- Pennsylvania: hired the fire department to provide health and safety training for the ECE workforce.
- Tennessee: Provided child care scholarships
- Jacksonville:
 - Kids Hope Alliance: the city appointed directors to govern certain areas within early education.
 - Jacksonville Public Education Fund and the Kids Hope Alliance are implementing parent leadership training
 - Special emphasis on supporting providers by coaching and training the ECE workforce.
 - They involve the community in the process of determining needs to set an agenda on what the city will do.

- Annual book distribution
- Funding sources: Federal, state(backbone), DFACS, military, Office of Early Learning
- Fort Worth:
 - Fort Worth Early Learning Alliance actively engaged stakeholders
 - Council member appointed to work with this alliance.
 - There was passion to improve the system. So much so, that the superintendent paid the salaries of staff for the first two years. This level of dedication is important.

She noted that addressing equity issues is critically important:

- It is important to incorporate the value of equity. Be explicit in addressing equity gaps. Embed equity questions in every solution.
- Consider a racial equity consultant, to ensure the those questions are answered.'

She also spoke to the importance of strong partners:

- The Municipal government must be a strong partner, fully engaged. They need to use their influence to convene stakeholders to align ECE.
- School districts need to maintain active community engagement and share city-wide data.

She concluded by recommended a framework:

- Intentional partnerships and a collaborative governance structure
- Families must be at the center
- Define values
- A solid, concise plan
- Work the plan with active promotion

Visioning Early Childhood in 2023

Participants working individually and then in pairs were asked to envision what we will have accomplished by 2023. Ideas were then placed on stickies. They included:

VISIONARY GOALS

- Ensure that there is equity for high quality, affordable early learning programs for children throughout the city.
- We ensure no family in Atlanta pays over 20% (set an appropriate %) of their income for childcare.
- Parents have a wide array of quality options.
- Creation of a city-wide vision for the experience of children in Atlanta starting from birth.
- Percentage of kids entering kindergarten ready to learn increases by 25%.
- 3rd grade literacy on track to be 77% by 2025,
- Young children become a state priority.
- Sustain and implement our plan set in June 2018.
- Leverage our Pre-K position to expand to younger children; universal early care and learning.
- We prioritize for those most vulnerable, most in need.

ALIGNMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND FUNDING

- Coordinated funding streams to provide a comprehensive system of care for children birth to 5 in poverty.

- Alignment between early childhood and public school.
- More cradle to college pipelines (clustering Atlanta's schools)
- Common enrollment system was launched for pre-k in Atlanta to ensure demand is met through considering parental choice (where is the demand).
- Stable and permanent early learning council with data backbone.
- More funding for 0-3 slots
- Atlanta supported funding for early education
- The biggest challenge is funding. Lack of funding overcome by partnerships, pooling resources, effectively using resources.

EARLY INTERVENTION AND OTHER SERVICES

- Children and families receive early intervention.
- All children and staff at early learning centers have access to behavioral health specialists.
- All APS schools operate day and into the evening to provide services to children/families.

INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- More funding for 0-3 slots
- Maternal and infant wellness campaign.
- Launch an initiative that provides children with access to affordable quality early learning programs including free birth to pre-k for low income families.

ADDRESSING THE WORKFORCE

- Financial incentives for child care teachers to obtain needed credentials to stay in the field.
- Workforce pipeline quality- quality is skill level, pay level, and retention.
- Robust, impactful, and job embedded professional development.
- We train, recognize, support incentivize pay early learning teachers.
- Atlanta supported funding for early childhood workforce (scholarships/incentives) addressing supply and quality.

CREATE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- Atlanta launched scholarship/subsidy program to provide access for children 0-4 that build on states existing investments.
- A sliding scale scholarship available to all city/essential service/healthcare/education employees for their children to attend a Quality Rated ELC.
- Childcare scholarships that make quality child care affordable for all families.
- Create a city-wide scholarship fund to help low-income families access high quality ECE, using primarily public, and some private dollars.
- Atlanta opens early learning center near/in City Hall for its employees.

CREATE NEW HIGH-QUALITY OPTIONS

- Employers banded together to create early learning centers proximate to their offices. A public/private nonprofit ECL model, a win-win for employers and their employees.
- Implemented Pre-K classes in every APS elementary school.
- All APS schools operate day and into the evening to provide services to children/families.
- Establish 24-hour daycare location.

SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS

- Parents can support their children's early learning. (paid family leave/knowledge and skills).
- Community needs assessments to better understand needs.

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING

- Marketing/branding/empowering movement that emphasizes the importance of quality birth to five educators. i.e., higher pay, discounted childcare, legitimize and elevate the profession so society views ECE workers as a top profession.
- City-wide messaging/kinder-countdown.

**The next meeting is March 28th from 8:30 am – Noon
in the Old Council Chambers in City Hall.**