

**Arkansas Department of Human Services
Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
Better Beginnings Public Hearing**

**Minutes of Hearing
April 28, 2010**

The Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education (DCCECE) held a public hearing on the Better Beginnings Quality Rating Improvement System on Wednesday, April 28, 2010, 1:00 PM at the state DHS office, 700 Main, Little Rock, Arkansas. DHS executive staff members present were Steven Jones, Deputy Director; Tonya Russell, Director; Shawn Glenn, Assistant Director; Mark Story, Assistant Director; and David Griffin, Associate Director.

Tonya Russell welcomed attendees and opened the public hearing on Better Beginnings.

Vicki Mathews presented the Better Beginnings 'center-based' component area grid, noting revisions.

Tonya asked for public comments and questions.

Questions:

1. On 2.A.2 Strengthening Families webinar requirement, is the webinar available yet?

Agency Response: The Arkansas webinar is not yet available, but administrators should become familiar with the Strengthening Families curriculum so at level 3 they can self-assess and implement at least 1 action step. The Arkansas webinar should be available within 2 months.

2. Could other tools be allowed instead of Strengthening Families?

Agency Response: The Division is not aware of a comparable tool for child abuse prevention, but we are open to looking at other tools as they become available.

3. Who is the primary caregiver vs. the secondary caregiver in the Family Child Care environment?

Agency Response: These are defined on pg. 2 of the Better Beginnings Guide.

4. Has there been clarification made on differences in required training hours for full-time vs. part-time staff?

Agency Response: There are no differences in professional development requirements for full-time vs. part time staff. This is not a change from the current Quality Accreditation requirements.

5. A request was made to define full-time vs. part-time and to consider the Dept. of Labor definitions so they match.

Agency Response: The Fair Labor Standards Act does not define full-time employment or part-time employment. PAS defines full-time as 35+ hours per week of paid work and part-time as between 20 - 34 hours per week. Work-study and seasonal employees work less than 20 hours per week. The definition in PAS is referring to staff benefits though.

6. Will PAS be reviewed by DHS counsel or other Arkansas licensed counsel for compliance or conflicts with AR law with emphasis on employee handbooks or personnel manuals?

Agency Response: The term “documents needed” in PAS does not mean the facility is required to have those documents. The documents listed are only suggested sources for the information that may be requested during a PAS review.

7. Are PAS salary scales being mandated for inclusion in the employee handbook?

Agency Response: The tool gives higher credit for agencies/programs that share salary scales with employees. These are not mandated to be included in the employee handbook, but could be provided a number of ways.

8. Why are you using the Strengthening Families tool and PAS rather than writing AR specific rules and regulations?

Agency Response: The tools were suggested by Early Childhood program directors and professionals who work on developing the Quality Rating Improvement System.

9. What provisions are in place to monitor changes in PAS and its future potential conflicts?

Agency Response: Where an item in PAS conflicts with Arkansas Law or rules and regulations promulgated by DCCECE or DHS, the latter will prevail and the PAS item in conflict will not be used.

10. Is Better Beginnings optional for ABC grant recipients?

Agency Response: Arkansas Better Chance operates under Act 49 and rules and regulations that have been promulgated for ABC. If Better Beginnings is approved as the quality rating system for the state, ABC programs would be required to meet at least BB Level 1 and any other ABC quality standards.

11. Will centers be notified when compliance with PAS standard may create legal liability for them?

Agency Response: Where an item in PAS conflicts with Arkansas Law or rules and regulations promulgated by DCCECE or DHS, the latter will prevail and the PAS item in conflict will not be used.

12. How do PAS and Better Beginnings interact with or affect Quality ratings and standards for ABC grant recipients? Also, is PAS is an overall tool, not classroom specific, so does ABC now apply to all classrooms and areas?

Agency Response: See Agency Response to Question 10.

13. Will confidentiality of student records be maintained through written policies and both Better Beginnings and PAS be reviewed for compliance with AR and federal laws?

Agency Response: Yes.

14. If PAS and Better Beginnings are optional then why are the rules being promulgated rather than suggested?

Agency Response: Better Beginnings is being promulgated because it is a revision to the rules and regulations of the Arkansas Childcare Approval System, promulgated in 1993.

15. Did the Department's financial impact study take into account all of the costs to the centers for achieving compliance at each level? If so, what specific costs and expenses were included in the analysis and where was the data sourced?

Agency Response: The Agency responded to the AR Child Care Provider Association's cost analysis for each level. A copy is available upon request.

16. Please specify the edition of PAS being used and the specific PAS provisions not being utilized?

Agency Response: The PAS version being used was copyrighted in 2004. In the Better Beginnings grid item 3.A.1, PAS items 5 and 6 are scored but not included in the average and PAS items 22–25 are not scored.

17. Is there an appeals process should providers disagree with their Better Beginnings assigned level?

Agency Response: Yes, as defined in the Better Beginnings rules and regulations. The Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC) has established a committee to address those concerns.

18. Do the number of training hours required have to be from TAPP?

Agency Response: No, but we strongly encourage all trainings to be registered in TAPP.

19. Do the number of annual training hours go by calendar year, hire date, etc.?

Agency Response: Twelve months beginning with the BB certification date.

20. Does ABC still require a higher ECERS score?

Agency Response: Yes. See Question 10.

21. QRIS seems to incent providers to stay at lower certification levels.

Agency Response: The incentives are designed to assist programs to make improvements in order to achieve and sustain higher levels of quality.

22. Would you consider minimum licensing be Level 1, and QRIS be Levels 2 through 4?

Agency Response: Due to the voluntary nature of Better Beginnings, we did not want to tie it to minimum licensing requirements.

Testimonials:

Shirley Post stated that she was a pilot test site for Better Beginnings and had a PAS review. After doing the assessment, she knew what she needed to improve upon and it made her grateful that she is now able to provide for children better than she was able to before.

Joanna Grymes read a letter of support from Arkansas Early Childhood Association and submitted a letter of support from Traveling Arkansas' Professional Pathways (TAPP).

Barbara Gilkey gave a written statement of support for Better Beginnings from the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC).

Nickie Hammontree stated that she has been working with the DCCECE and ASU to maintain a higher level of quality and she thinks Better Beginnings is something that will become more comfortable for people as they become familiar with it, similar to the Environment Rating Scale when it was adopted. She thinks we all need to do our best to provide for the children of Arkansas, and Better Beginnings is perfect for that.

Dot Brown stated that Arkansas licensing requirements are ranked 49th in the nation. She read a definition of minimum and stated that the fact we are on the low end of minimum is scary. She

defined maximum and stated that Better Beginnings is the road we need to take to guide us toward the maximum. She feels BB is very manageable for people that want to provide the best for children. Dot submitted a written statement.

Terri Helms wanted to applaud the Division for taking steps to make child care better for the children of Arkansas. She remembers the difficulties the requirement to place alarms on vehicles caused, but no longer reads in the newspaper about children in child care being left in a vehicle. She thinks that implementing a quality rating system is the greatest step we can take to provide for the children of Arkansas and thinks facilities that step forward and sign up for Better Beginnings want to serve children the best way they can. She thinks that the free trainings currently offered are excellent and applauds the state for offering these. She has seen staff attend the free trainings and implement what they learned in teaching children. She thinks Better Beginnings is the step that needs to be taken to make sure our children succeed.

Vicki Shelby stated that she knows there are providers out there that want to provide better for children and thinks Better Beginnings is a roadmap for them to follow to get the guidance needed to implement what is best for their center and the children.

Melba Conelly stated that in the 10 years since she opened her child care center she has come a long way and it took much hard work to get there. She stated that there is a lot of information out there provided by the Division and their partners, and thinks Better Beginnings is the instruction needed to help them provide quality care to children.

Dana Mynatt stated that she took it upon herself to find out how to better serve her children and found that through the current Quality Accreditation System and the professional development trainings offered, she has reduced her staff turnover. She stated that people want to work with a quality facility and she has come a long way from where she was 9 years ago. She found that training has helped her retain staff and in doing so, she is able to keep her doors open to continue providing for children. She stated that the Program Administration Scale (PAS) is a good tool to guide people in the right direction to attain quality and it helps her manage her staff and to know what needs to be done to keep staff trained. She stated that she appreciates everything everyone has done to make the Better Beginnings program come into being.

Michelle Stephens stated that early childhood isn't different than any other business in Arkansas. She thinks that the PAS is the cost of doing business and it sets good standards for the business of early child care. She thinks that people are looking at the short-term impact vs. the long-term benefit. She stated that early child care and education are our future. It impacts the workforce now and in the future, when the children of today graduate. It has a long term community impact; for every \$1 invested there is a \$9 return on investment in reduction of social services and remediation, and increased graduation rates. She stated it is time to stand up and provide for these children to make this possible and bring in the additional funding. We are so focused on today that we are losing sight of our future. A lot of resources are already available. Short-term sacrifices are necessary to meet long-term goals.

Gigi Schoenstein stated that she is very supportive and appreciative of what she and her staff have received in training and the BB guidance they have received. The trainings gave a sense of

purpose to her teachers. Gigi stated she believes in Better Beginnings and with a whole heart thinks that a lot of research points us in this direction to provide the best for the children of Arkansas.

Pam Jenkins with the Head Start/Early Head Start State-Based T/TA Office provided a written statement in support of Better Beginnings.

Written submissions:

TAPP System Steering Committee

Statement for Better Beginnings

TAPP (Traveling Arkansas' Professional Pathways) is the name of Arkansas's statewide early childhood professional development system. TAPP and its precursor (Arkansas Early Childhood Professional Development System or AECPPDS) have worked with the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education since 2003 to improve the access to and quality of professional development available to those who work in an array of Arkansas' early care and education settings. Professional development for child care providers has consistently been identified as a promising practice for improving the overall quality of care (for example, Vandell & Wolfe, 2000; Zaslow, Tout, Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the country's largest professional association for those who work with young children, states that professional development is the path that leads to a highly competent work force; a highly competent workforce is necessary in order to provide high quality programs to young children (NAEYC, n.d.). As recently as February 2010, the National Governor's Association published a policy brief about the importance of developing a professional development system because, to quote the brief, "A well-prepared and continually supported early childhood professional workforce is key to providing such quality education and care," (Demma, 2010, p. 8).

Arkansas' Minimal Licensing Requirements have been ranked very low in comparison to other states in the nation. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) ranked the state's regulation standards as 49th in the nation (NACCRAA, 2009). Two contributing factors to this low ranking are related to the professional education and training of program staff. Center director requirements for education and experience are among the lowest in the nation as are the requirements for lead teachers in classrooms. Thirty nine states call for more than the 10 annual hours of training for child care staff required by Arkansas's Minimum Licensing Requirements. Of two of the states with lower annual training requirements, lead teachers are required to have a credential or degree in early childhood, while a lead teacher in Arkansas needs only a high school degree. (NACCRAA, 2010) If professional development is an important pathway to quality, this is a pathway that Arkansas does not require per its licensing regulations.

Better Beginnings, the proposed Quality Rating Improvement System, provides the beginning steps for moving all participating programs forward in quality. A voluntary program, Better Beginnings provides incentive, motivation and encouragement for programs and staff to be more engaged in the professional development available to them. Opportunities for input and stakeholder involvement have seen many changes in the recommendations, including changes in professional development participation. The current draft of Better Beginnings moves Arkansas forward by encouraging programs to take a more structured view of staff professional development, encouraging higher expectations on the part of staff for completing professional development, and in doing so, moves our youngest children closer to consistent, high quality care and education.

References

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National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. (2009). *We Can Do Better: NACCRRRA's Ranking of State Child Care Center Regulations and Oversight*. Accessed at http://www.naccrra.org/publications/naccrra-publications/publications/We%20Can%20Better%202009_MECH-screen.pdf.

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M. Zaslow, K. Tout, K. Maxwell, & R. Clifford. (2004). *The Role of Professional Development in Creating High Quality Preschool Education*. Paper prepared for the Brookings-University of North Carolina Conference on Preschool Education

September 9-10, 2004, Washington, D.C. Accessed at http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2005_09_09_SP_PreTeachers.pdf.

Arkansas Early Childhood Commission/Arkansas Early Learning
Council

Quality Rating Improvement System-Better Beginnings

Position Statement

As good stewards of the public trust, the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission (AECC)/Arkansas Early Learning Council (AELC) supports and advises the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. Our purpose is to help ensure that **all** Arkansas children and their families have access to a safe, high quality, developmentally appropriate, nurturing, learning environment. We seek to do this by educating and assisting parents, child care providers, and communities to prepare our children for success today and in the future.

The AECC/AELC is comprised of members representing various sectors and groups that include private and faith-based organizations, family day care homes, Head Start, home visiting, health, which includes mental health, higher education, business and legislative representatives.

In April, 2009, the Early Childhood Commission met for two days and emerged with five goals that included support and implementation of a Quality Rating Improvement System.

Members of the Commission voted unanimously in January, 2010 to approve the Better Beginnings Rules based on feedback from 58 information meetings since October, 2007, conference presentations

and focus groups that provided information on the proposed standards and process. This was in addition to the 49 workshop specific sessions on the proposed rating system that were held between August, 2009 and April, 2010.

In our regularly scheduled meeting held on April 20, 2010, we reaffirmed our commitment to each of the five goals developed in 2009 which includes supporting the implementation of a Quality Rating Improvement System. Every child in our state deserves an opportunity to attend a high quality preschool program. As members of the Arkansas Early Learning Council/Early Childhood Commission, we would like to go on record in full support of this process.

*The State Plan in AR is
Minimum Licensing Requirements*

Arkansas' Minimum Licensing Requirements have been ranked 49th in the Nation (National Association of Child Care and Referral Agencies (NACCRA 2009).

This ranking caused me to look for a definition of "minimum" and this is what I found:

minimum –

- 1. the smallest quantity, number, etc. possible**
 - 2. the lowest degree or point reached**
- (Webster's New World Dictionary and Style Guide 2004)**

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So if there are degrees of minimum...we are at the bottom.

And I don't think any of us here would agree that this is good for children, their families, our communities and our state.

From the same Dictionary comes this definition of the word "maximum"

Maximum-

- 1. the greatest quantity, number, etc. possible or permissible**
- 2. the highest degree or point reached**

Better Beginnings provides the beginning and ascending steps for moving from minimum toward maximum. The steps outlined in Better Beginnings are manageable for programs that want to provide more than the minimum level of care for children. And one of the proven ways to do this is through professional development of child care providers.

*Pat Brown
Early Childhood Services*



"Supporting Arkansas' Early Childhood Partners"

Tonya Russell and Council Members;

Arkansas State-Base Training and Technical Assistance Team (AR SBOTTA) is here today (April 28, 2010) to stand in favor of Better Begins, a program to assist in the assurance of quality programming for our youngest and most vulnerable children, and requirements for the State of Arkansas.

Arkansas has worked diligently to meet the goal of July 2010 through; scheduled meetings, sharing information, research, piloting, validating, and evaluating all data sources to make Better Beginnings project ready by the implementation date.

As a state, Arkansas provides support to Early Childhood Programs, to meet the goals of Better Beginnings and to move up the levels on the scale. Programs may join voluntarily, may request assistance, and will experience the positive changes using Better Beginnings requirements.

As Early Childhood Advocates and trainers, we understand that utilizing this system is a change. However, as a State, who is a leader in many Early Childhood Education areas, and a pioneer for quality, we sit near the bottom of child/staff ratios. Now is the time to make these changes and lower the child/staff ratio;

**From: (6 infant: 1 staff)
To: (4 infant: 1 staff)**

This change should happen because; it is what is right and realistic in working with young children! Simply, it is what's best for each child.

Arkansas' children needs your support for a Better Beginning, to grow children to be healthy, ready for school, and ready to give back to a State that is committed to Quality care for children!

Respectfully,

Three handwritten signatures in black ink are written over the word "Respectfully". The signatures appear to be Pam Jenkins, Jan Cox, and Donna Alliston.

**The Head Start/Early Head Start State Based T/TA Office
Pam Jenkins, Jan Cox, and Donna Alliston**

Child staff ratio in
Arkansas is 6 infants to 1
caregiver. We are doing
harm if children are not
cared for appropriately. ~~Quality~~
Training suggestions are not taken
seriously because of # of children.
Lonna Allister

Melba Connelly
Growth House Benton
Suggestions - If anyone
comes in late is it really
necessary to review - Waste
of my time - Just like this
session/hearing - IF really

Concerned - be to the
First hearing & be
on time