



FIRST THINGS FIRST

The right system for bright futures

**Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board
Cochise Regional Partnership Council**

**Work Group Minutes
February 12, 2010**

Call to Order

The Workgroup Meeting of the First Things First Cochise Regional Partnership Council was held on Friday, February 12, 2010 at 10:00 AM at the University of Arizona South, Room 508, 1140 N Colombo Ave, Sierra Vista, AZ 85635.

Council Members Present:

Vaira Harik, Mary Sue Houser, Renae Humburg, Melodi Polach, Jane Strain and Nancy-Jean Welker (telephonically)

Council Members Absent:

Ana Bae-Limb, Del Cabarga, David Howe, Ginger Ryan, and Evelyn Whitmer

Others Present:

Melissa Avant, Cristal Martin, Michelle Quiroz, Christy Smith, Katricia Clenney, Tony Bruno and Marge Dailey

Chair Strain welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at approximately 10:18 AM.

Discussion of Possible New Strategies

Melissa Avant, Regional Coordinator, provided information sent from the First Things First State Board, who has given the Regional Councils the ability to “utilize unplanned, unexpended allocations for fiscal year 2010 to expand strategies where approved grants or agreements now exist within their region or to use such funds for emergency strategies previously approved by the Board, as long as the funds use clearly provides added value for children.” Ms. Avant also explained the options available to the Regional Council concerning this amended authority. The Regional Council can:

1. Leave everything as is.
2. Amend existing awards that would provide additional resources to a grantee with capacity to deliver services in a quality way to reach additional children and their families, such as Food Boxes and Emergency Scholarships – however, food boxes and scholarships will not be continued in 2011 per council vote.

3. Create new strategies that will be implemented August 1st, 2010 – but will not spend the carry forward allocation in SFY 2010. The proposed new strategies are Pre-K expansion opportunities and Access and Affordability opportunities. In the event that the Regional Council creates a new strategy, the Regional Council will be required to report back to the First Things First State Board on any changes made in funding approved strategies.

Tony Bruno, Director of Tucson Community Food Bank, discussed the issues facing area food banks.

1. There are problems with the reporting process, the local food banks have very little time to fulfill the reporting requirements.
2. Money is being lost because of transaction fees made to purchase the food boxes.
3. There is not a standardized food box, what is given in one area might be different at another location.
4. Procedures need to be in place for food bank cross-coordination. (Example: a Bisbee resident working in Sierra Vista should be able to pick up a food box in Sierra Vista instead of having to leave work early or missing their chance to pick up the food box in Bisbee.)

The Regional Council discussed Food Boxes and the fundamental importance of proper nutrition for children birth through five. Parents and caregivers in Cochise County are struggling to provide balanced meals to their children because of the economic crisis facing the country. The Regional Council remains concerned but does not want “throw money at a problem”, but rather build the infrastructure and facilitate systemic change. The Regional Council is aware of the needs of the county and feels this strategy is worthy to be revisited. The Regional Council would be interested to address Food Boxes, to form a new strategy with central control, cost effectiveness and accountability in order to set up a proper system.

Marge Dailey, Imagine School, spoke to the Regional Council about the Emergency Child Care Scholarships and the impact Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) licensing fees will have on child care. The Emergency Scholarships provided a great help to the families who had them. Some families were able to save enough money in that time to continue child care when the scholarships were over. Imagine School offered a transitional fee and of the 21 families, 17 remained in child care. As a result of the hike in ADHS licensing fees, child care centers must raise fees and some of the centers and homes will simply have to close down. This is a problem because children not enrolled in centers might not have access to proper nutrition and early literacy programs. Parents and caregivers that cannot afford the higher cost of child care have to quit their jobs or find alternatives that may not provide a quality setting for their children.

Christy Smith, Sierra Vista Public Schools, spoke of the impact increased licensing fees has on special needs preschool students. The program is not tuition based and provides the children early learning standards and helps them participate with their typical peers. The increased fees are not in the budget and the center is looking to add tuition based students or else face closure.

The Regional Council discussed the ADHS licensing fees and the possibility of a stipend. Rather than pay the entire child care amount, a sliding scale based on preset parameters could be put in place to subsidize the cost of child care. The Regional Council expressed concern that while the increase in child care fees is a problem that needs to be addressed, First Things First should not enable the State Legislature or supplant other state agencies from its responsibilities to children birth through five and ensure that decisions on this issue are in-line with regional council intent.

Michelle Quiroz, Sierra Vista Public Schools, spoke to the Regional Council about the Bobcat Preschool program. The Bobcat Preschool services four year old children of at-risk families that qualify for free and reduced lunch. The preschool is National Association for the Education of Early Childhood (NAEYC) accredited and licensed and is the only program in the county with this accreditation. They were recently informed that the Arizona Department of Education will no longer fund this program.

The Regional Council discussed Pre-K expansion programs. The Cochise Regional Council discussed the possibility of a competitive process through a Request for Grant Application (RFGA) in order to lay out standards of practice and what evaluation outcomes the Regional Council requires.

Discussion of Unspent Unobligated Funds

Unspent Allocation:

Carry Forward: \$268,552

Unplanned Potential Allocation:

Strategy Two - \$350,000

Strategy Four - \$135,000

- And any other strategy that has a fund balance at the end of June, 2010.

Total Potential Allocation for SFY 2011: \$753,552

Call to the Public

Tony Bruno, Tucson Community Food Bank, spoke to the Cochise Regional Council and thanked them for their work to improve the lives of children birth through five. Mr. Bruno stated that working for the betterment of children for systemic change on a local level is both frustrating and amazing. Mr. Bruno also invited the Cochise Regional Council to visit the warehouse in Tucson.

Adjournment

Member Welker informed the Regional Council of the formation of the South East Arizona Rural Chamber of Commerce for Cochise County and Graham County.

Chair Strain spoke to the Regional Council of the need to increase media coverage in order to increase public awareness of First Things First for Cochise County.

In conclusion, the Regional Council has directed the Cochise Regional Coordinator to:

1. Form a new strategy around Food Boxes that addresses the concerns of the Regional Council (cost effectiveness, efficiency, best practices and accountability).
 - a. Seek advice from the state level to see what steps other regions are taking on this strategy.
 - b. Inquire into collaborations with neighboring regions for the RFGA process.
 - c. Inquire into Angel Food Ministries.
2. Form a new strategy around Pre-K expansion.
 - a. Weigh the benefits of RFGA vs. IGA process.
 - b. Seek advice from the state level regarding the Arizona Early Childhood State Block Grant.
 - c. Include expectations that include early literacy.
3. Form a new strategy around child care stipends.

- a. Ensure strategy is crafted to address ADHS licensing fees and child care affordability for parents and caregivers.

There being no further discussions, Chair Strain adjourned the meeting at 12:38 PM.

Dated this 18 day of February, 2010.

Submitted By: Cristal Martin
Administrative Assistant

Approved By: 
Chair, Jane Strain