

Caring for Our Children Basics Webinar

February 10, 2015

Tricia Haley: A few announcements and then we will get started. First of all, as you have likely seen, all of the lines are muted on this call. It's so that we can avoid background noise and other kinds of disruptions. It is not because we don't want to hear your questions, we absolutely do. Feel free to chat them to us throughout the course of the webinar. We'll be watching them as they come in, but then Linda and Moniquin will be answering the ones that they can get to at the end of the webinar.

Finally, we always, always, always get the question of whether or not these slides are available; they are not yet, but they will be. We actually plan to archive this entire webinar, including the slides, and when we have that up, we will send it your way.

And with that, I will turn it over to Linda Smith, the deputy assistant secretary for early childhood development at the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

Linda Smith: And thank you. Thank you every one for joining today. This is actually a nice day for us here. This is a project that we've been working on for a long time. We're very excited to do the briefing for you and then take some questions on it, and hopefully can encourage you, if you haven't already, to make comments to the standards in the Federal Register.

The purpose of the webinar today is to ensure that all of our State partners have information on what the Caring for Our Children Basics is really all about; how we developed them, look at the standards across the different domains, the way that we can use them to align programs across, and as those of you who heard me talk, talk about this horizontal alignment of our program from child care Head Start prekindergarten (HS preK) across the board; and then, obviously, answer some questions for you.

So the next slide just shows you the goals of the early childhood program here at ACF. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on them, but just quickly. Obviously, we've talked about building the early learning systems across these different domains, and this is, again, a point of these standards and the work we're doing. How we are promoting high-quality accountable programs for all of our children, looking at the workforce, and there are references in the standards for some of the workforce requirements. Promoting family engagement, and then obviously the focus of this one is on improving health and safety in all of our early learning programs.

So these are sort of philosophical issues, but it is our belief here that, and obviously I think probably everyone on this call, that high quality does have significant benefits for our children; and that quite the opposite, poor-quality results and unsafe quality has a disregard for children's physical and emotional safety and well-being, especially leading to some of the things that you show there.

So we basically feel that health and safety is a foundation for what we're trying to do here. Survey after survey, the latest a couple years ago, shows that when parents are out looking for programs that they prioritize health and safety above all other quality features when selecting a child care arrangement, so it's very important to parents. Sometimes I think parents have been fooled into thinking certain things are going on in programs that in fact are not when it comes to health and safety. And we'll talk a little bit about why we think this answers some of those questions.

The next slide just gives you some of the issues that we think have been out there, that there's great variability between health and safety standards among the States and across jurisdictions and across programs. We know that here between HS and child care, we'll talk about that a little bit more later on. There is no Federal guidance that supports States in this.

We certainly have invested a lot in the *Caring for Our Children* book. We've done that work with our partners over at the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) and throughout a number of agencies here in the government. But if you look at that book, and we do all the time; we go to it as a reference book for almost everything we do here, we also recognize that it can be a little overwhelming to a provider out there; that it's more like a telephone book than it is a handy, dandy, little guide for some of the basic things.

So when we started this work, we wanted to recognize the fact that we wanted to put something out there that we thought would be the minimum that all programs could and should share, when it comes to the health and safety of children.

We've taken a look at these in a number of ways, and I want to just back up and say that States have taken many actions over the last several years to improve health and safety requirements in child care programs. In center-based programs in particular, you see 27 States have made changes to their licensing regulations, and more than half, have made changes to their family child care home standard.

So there has been an increase. Noteworthy is that the largest increase was in the number of States that are requiring safe sleep practices, but there sure are a number of things that we would like to see all States include in their basic standards.

So I think we've made a lot of progress. The States have worked really hard on this over the last several years, but there is more work that needs to be done.

So we decided here, and this has been in the works now for a couple of years, actually, here at ACF, to look at developing a set of voluntary, what we call "model" or "standards" that the States could look at and that would provide a baseline, a foundation, the minimum, if you will, or the floor for early care and education across all programs. And I think I need to keep stressing that, and we stress it in the preamble to the standards that were in the Federal Register; we view these standards as very basic.

What we wanted to make sure that we pass the sniff test on these things, or the laugh test, whichever one you want to call it, in terms of people saying, you've got to be kidding me, you're

asking for, and there's been over time many laughable things that don't make sense to parents, that don't make sense to legislators. So we tried to go for the minimum, and that there wouldn't be anyone out there who could laugh at us for saying we want to require SIDS training, we want to require safe water practices when people have pools, those types of things, that no one would think they were unreasonable to ask for a child care program.

So again, keeping in mind that these are a basic, minimal, model standards that States and other programs can use to evaluate their own standards against to see that everything is covered.

So with all of that, I'm going to turn it over to Moniquin Huggins now, who is the director here at the Office of Child Care (OCC) for program operations and been the lead person in the OCC for the work we've been doing. So Moniquin, over to you.

Moniquin Huggins: So Linda talked a lot about the partners we've been working with, and I just wanted to reiterate, and just say we've spent a great deal of time working across ACF and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to identify a set of standards that can serve as a baseline for early childhood programs. Within ACF, we've worked with Linda's office, the OCC, the office of (HS), and our long-time partners at the MCHB, as well as the Division of Home Visiting.

We've also consulted with and gathered input from outside experts in the field of health, licensing, and resource referral agencies. And just to give you an example, we've engaged Rick Fiene, Walter Gilliam, Nancy vonBargen, Colleen Koch, Judy Collins. Those are names that are well-known in the field.

We've also been in contact and engaged the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in early care and education in Colorado.

And before I go on, I would be remiss not to thank our own in-house lead here, and that's Katie Beckmann. She would have been part of this webinar this afternoon, but as many of you know, or maybe you don't know, she just recently gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. But she is the lead and has led our development in working across partners, both within HHS and outside of HS in developing these standards, so I just wanted to make a note of that in the webinar this afternoon.

And Linda mentioned this, we use existing resources, because we know there were resources and documents out there that Linda mentioned, *Care for Our Children and Stepping Stones for Care for Our Children*. And we just want to really take this time to acknowledge the extensive work of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and I mentioned just before the American Public Health Association, and the resource center, for their work in developing these resources that we use. We also, in developing the standards used for key indicators from the (HS) program, which Rick Fiene was a part of, and he's with the Institute for Key Indicators. And also Abbey Alkon, who is with the University of San Francisco in California, with the 77 observable health and safety standards for early care and education providers.

We use those resources and really did a real in-depth look at those standards in identifying the standards for Caring for Our Children Basics, as I said before. And then we reached out to our partners, got input, and that has led us to the most recent Federal Register announcement for Caring for Our Children Basics.

If you've had a chance, and hopefully you have had a chance, to look at Caring for Our Children Basics, you will see that currently there are 66 proposed standards across 8 domains, and so 8 domains are listed there in the slide. And I just wanted to quickly go through the slide, through the domains, and just say for staffing, when you look under that domain, you'll see background checks on a pre-service training for orientation. Then when you look at the program activities for healthy development, you will see the status for monitoring children's development.

Down further, you will see health promotion and protection. In that area, the domains are opportunities for physical activity, the safe sleep practices, and the SIDS risk reduction. Those are just highlights; there are many standards, but I didn't want to take up too much [inaudible] because our goal is to leave time this afternoon to hear questions from you.

When you look at the nutrition and food services, of course you have standards regarding USDA-CACFP guidelines; caring for children with food allergies; and preparation areas for access. Under the facilities, we have the inspection for buildings, the fire code, the use and storage of processed substance, as well as the first aid and emergency supplies. And then, of course, the play areas and playground and transportation, of course you'll have standards related to transportation and outdoor play areas.

Infectious disease, I would be remiss, we all know of the measles outbreak now. Immunization documentation regarding unimmunized, standard regarding unimmunized children. And I would just pause a moment, to just urge everyone that's on the sound to please be in contact with your local public health department and follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) rules and recommendations regarding immunizing young children, because we know this could be a serious health problem for young children, especially in group settings such as child care.

And, of course, the last domain is in regards to policies. And, of course, in that area, you have medication administration, disaster planning, and certificates of a number of policies that you can develop as it relates to your program.

So the last slide here is using Caring for Our Children. And we really do believe that Caring for Our Children Basics is a tool that States and agencies can use to align requirements across all early child care programs regardless of funding. So if you're in licensing, incorporating Caring for Our Children Basics can serve as a baseline to ensure programs meet at least the minimum basic requirements, as Linda stated earlier.

These Caring for Our Children Basics align with the HS standards. And as many of you know, the recent reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) in late November brought new specific health and safety requirements for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) program, and the Caring for Our Children Basics aligns well with these new

requirements. The new requirements are background checks, monitoring, infections, and training requirements for providers.

And as you know, before the reauthorization, States had a great deal of flexibility in those three areas related to infectious disease training, and building and physical premises safety. But the new law put very specific requirements in four states, and we think that this will be a great tool the States could use in order to meet those requirements.

Caring for Our Children also provides an opportunity for coordination to maximize resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

And I just wanted to make this note before I turn it over to Linda again, that the new reauthorization did not stipulate who would carry out the law. Normally it's the CCDF lead agency. But if you really look at the reauthorization, there are 'many more entities that should and could be involved in administering the program, or actually implementing the program. For example, the licensing department. The licensing agency that's working with the CCDF lead agency, or if there are 'other agencies within the state that we can coordinate, that you can coordinate, and bring those entities together.

States have flexibility. We're not taking away that flexibility. But States also have the flexibility to coordinate and collaborate across agencies, so it could be the licensing agency that does the implementation around the licensing. It could be working with the (USDA) in order to conduct the monitoring. But Caring for Our Children will provide you with the tool that you need to align programs across and provide the tool for whatever agencies that you're working with to coordinate.

So with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Linda.

Linda Smith: Well, before we start to take questions, if you have them, go ahead and start to think about them now. One of the things I do want to add to what Moniquin said is that as a part of this being in the Federal Register, this is also being coordinated with other agencies in the Federal government, like the Department of Education (ED). And we've done a lot of work with the Department of Defense in other areas. We are really trying pretty hard to align, to use something, or, to create something here that everyone can sort of think about and use as a benchmark.

So as we move forward again, we do not -- these are not regulations, they are simply model standards that people can look at their own health and safety standards against those and hopefully fill some gaps if they need to. And as Moniquin said, the staff here has done a lot of work, coordinated with a lot of people on these things, and so I think it's collectively the best thinking of a lot of very hard-working, smart people in this country.

So with that, I think we'll open it up for questions that you might have. But again, just so you know, they are in the Federal Register right now for comments, and I think they close on the 20th.

Moniquin Huggins: 17th.

Linda Smith: The 17th will be the last day for comments on them. So if you haven't commented already, please do so. While we're waiting to see if we have any questions, one question that we have had here is, will we be transparent in these and let people see what comments we got? And we certainly can make any comments that we get from these available to the public. So far, the comments that we've got, we've been watching, and have been very helpful, making really substantive suggestions about the standards, but positive comments nonetheless. So we're encouraged by this, and I guess we'll see if we have any questions.

Tricia Haley: We do not have any questions chatted in yet. Folks, feel free to chat your questions through. I noticed that somebody does have their hand raised, and we don't have our hand raise feature in use on this particular webinar. So, if you are the person with your hand raised, feel free to, oh. You already took it down. Well done.

Feel free to chat your question in, and we will try to answer it. I was going to say the old-fashioned way, but I don't think that applies here. I think hand-raising, actually, probably would have been the old-fashioned way. So, do feel free to chat those questions in.

Linda Smith: As we wait, one of the other things that we had been doing, and part of our thinking on this has been, at the time we started the work on this is we were working on the child care Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM). Now we have a new law, and we're working on that.

But obviously, we're also thinking about revising the HS standards. So, we looked at all of these things across those 2 domains to try and make sure that we, if nothing else, are not contradicting each other in our own regulations that we put out, or standards, etc. So, we've done a fair amount of looking at that, and they are cross-referenced from both the H S and the child care side.

Tricia Haley: As always, the first question, and probably the last, and somewhere in the middle, is will we get sent a copy of the PowerPoint? As I mentioned early on, it is our intention to put not only the PowerPoint but this full webinar online, hopefully within the next couple of weeks. Once we have it up, we will send a note out to all participants and make sure that you can access that information.

You guys may have set a record for the clearest, most straightforward webinar, because we are not getting a lot of questions.

You will notice, folks who are on the call that the link that's on your screen was also chatted out. We realize that the link that's on your PowerPoint is not live. So, you feel free to check your chat box and access the link from there, if you're interested in commenting.

Linda Smith: Well, if we don't have any questions, then --

Tricia Haley: Oh, now they're coming in. So we'll start with, "What is the plan for those States that do not have strong, or for that matter, any licensing regulations in place for child care?"

Linda Smith: Well, I know where Deanna is from.

Really, they're not regulatory from our perspective. And so one of the things that we would hope in a State that doesn't have any standards at all, that they might look at these as a basis on which they would build something.

And, that perhaps. if you have legislative bodies that really don't think basic regulations are worthwhile, that maybe they would take a look at these. Because they have been sort of thought from that common sense, what is the least we really need to do here, not the least, but what we need to do to cover children's safety. So, there's really not a lot of fluff in there, and I think they would make sense.

So I would encourage you, Deanna, to see and to talk with some of your legislative committees about these, in that they are just very basic, they're not far overreaching as some people sometimes get concerned about.

The next one is what will be the frequency. We basically have in the standards, and you can look in them, the recommendations that were in the Caring for Our Children. Now, some of these things are now going to be, will defer to the regulations, for example, H S, or what's in the new CCDBG law. So, the frequency is spelled out in those two laws, not in the standards, per se.

Tricia Haley: "When does the commentary period end?" Can you say that again, Moniquin?

[talking over each other]

Tricia Haley: For commenting on the --

Moniquin Huggins: For the [inaudible] -- 17th.

Tricia Haley: Thank you. "Are you guys sharing information with the ED?"

Linda Smith: Yes. We have. And they've already commented back to us on that. And I think, for the most part, we're very happy with what they saw in them.

Tricia Haley: We got another question asking if there will be a report to see which States have voluntarily adopted these guidelines.

Moniquin Huggins: There could be, yes. We haven't decided what mechanism we'll use, but through our technical assistance (TA), there could be.

Linda Smith: And just to note, as part of the work in leading up to these being published, we did have our TA folks, Nancy vonBargen and her crew, look at the standards and compare them to existing State standards. So we have a sense of where the states are aligned, for

the most part, not on all standards, but on most of them. So, we will be sharing some of that, as we move forward as well.

Tricia Haley: Kind of tied to that, Linda, someone has asked if there are any recommendations about aligning these in Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) programs in the various States.

Linda Smith: Well, I think that would be an excellent way to think about them. I think what we call the basics here as sort of the entry level for any program, and that as we're building tiered systems and we're striving for higher levels of quality, then we should look at some of the other things, in terms of after we have met all of these, and if you're a State that wants to do more in terms of as you build a QRIS, you want to have improved and increased health and safety standards.

But you look at the next level up, which might be Stepping Stone. And then you go from that to the full document of *Caring for Our Children*, so that we build from the basics, a continuum on how states could move forward in looking at improved quality around health and safety.

Tricia Haley: I'm not sure I entirely have a handle on this one, but we'll give it a try. "When can we expect the proposed basics to become finalized and need to review as an item to be contributed during the revision process of rules changing and writing?" What my thought is that this is kind of a question about whether or not folks are being held to this standard --

Linda Smith: Well, this is not a regulation. We just published these in the Federal Register for comment, to get the best before we did publish them, as final model standards for States. So, I would think that we would be looking to take the comments and have something this summer in final.

Moniquin Huggins: Right. And I think the commenter or the person asking the question may also be thinking if they're going to make any proposals, they want to make sure they have the final document in place before they move forward to revise any of their regulations.

Linda Smith: Got it. Right. Oh, okay. And that's a good question. And, thank you for that, because that actually does say that we do need to take a look at this quickly.

Tricia Haley: Oh, you already got it, Moniquin. Correctly interpreted the question; thank you for clarifying, Megan.

I guess with that, that's our last question. With one final reminder that in your chat box, you will see the link to the Federal Register notice.

And yes. Someone has again asked about a recording of the webinar. We are recording the webinar. We will have it online hopefully within the next couple of weeks, and we will plan to send out an e-mail to all participants so that you can access it and share it among your colleagues, as you find helpful.

Linda Smith: Well, as we said when we started this, we are looking for you to make comments, and you have about another week or so to do that. So, please take a look at them and get us anything that you think does impact that common sense guarantee, because that's what we're really trying to do here. So, if there's something that you think we need to look at, now is the time to let us know.

So, thank you all for joining us, and thanks for the great questions. We appreciate it.

Moniquin Huggins: Thank you.

Tricia Haley: All right. That concludes. Thanks very much, everyone. Have a great afternoon.

(END)