

NYC CRP
Minutes of the Meeting
April 7, 2009

Attendees:

David Lansner
Wayne Ho

Elba Montalvo
Marion White

Jorge Saenz De Vitera

ACS Staff: Commissioner Mattingly Elysia Carnevale
OCFS Staff: Terry Palumbo
SCAA Staff: Diane Mastin
Guest: Karen He

Handouts:

Agenda

Legislation chart

OCFS Budget Summary

Vera Institute Memorandum: Preliminary Assessment of New York State's Approach to Educational Neglect and Options for Moving Forward

Summary: Regents Policy Statement on Improving Student Achievement and School Performance through Parent and Family Partnerships.

Chart: Percentage of Workers with More than 15 CPS Investigations

Minutes of the February 3, 2009 meeting

Karen He, Community Liaison from the Office of Assembly Member Sheldon Silver, presented an overview of the budget. The enacted budget restored many funds cut to important programs for children and families including COPS, home visiting, kinship programs, Advantage After-School programs, Child Care Block Grant, and the Community Development Block Grant. The Assembly also rejected the proposed increase to the SCR screening fees which would have hurt child care providers. There is some speculation that the budget will have to be reviewed mid-year in order to be responsive to the changing economic climate.

Commissioner Mattingly reported on the budget cuts he has had to make at ACS given the downturn in the economy. He referred to three rounds of PEGs or Program to Eliminate the Gap in the city's budget: November, December (which will take effect this July), and another projected for April before the April 26th date for the Mayor to present his budget. Last November Commissioner Mattingly had to cut his budget by \$100 million. In December, he made an additional cut over \$50 million. He now manages a budget of \$2.3 billion with 7200 staff. Approximately 1/3 of the budget is for child care. His priority was to minimize the impact on the front line when he made those cuts. He had restrictions on what he could do given existing contracts and the result was to lay off 620 staff and to cut foster care rates by 5%. Although he did not cut preventive, new money put into preventive is very much at risk. He did have to cut child care at levels 7, 8, and 9, levels which were not related to income eligibility.

He stated that ACS is very close to implementing phase 2 of IOC; they have received approval from OCFS and await approval from DOB. Phase 2 will allow ACS to heighten their monitoring. All basic decisions will be made within a family conference, most often with a

trained facilitator supporting the discussion. Family Permanency Services will only be 1/3 of its current size. The new RFP's will allow room for new agencies to apply and receive funds. This will be important in terms of meeting the needs of emerging populations.

Commissioner Mattingly stated that he had to make deep cuts to child care. Some of the decisions he had to make included asking 3200 families to use public kindergarten and to ask DOE to pick up the funding that ACS had provided for 10 hours of service for pre-k classrooms. The market rate increase in child care amounted to \$80 million in retroactive costs which DOB has helped ACS support. The increase will cost \$45 million going forward, but he will be able to use stimulus funds to support those increased rates. Without the support from DOB, he would have had to close 10,000 slots. Stimulus funds will help centers use the space that had been devoted to kindergarten for infant/toddler classrooms, age levels for which there is a need for care. He stated that the local districts need more state support for child care.

He then commented on the NYC specific recommendations in the Panels' 2008 report as well as the overall recommendations. He stated that he has made changes that are leading to improved mental health assessments and interventions for drug and alcohol use by supporting each office with a mental health consultant. Previously, they had to wait too long for assessments. He has started a pilot project targeting parents with long term drug and alcohol problems. Intervention now takes place immediately to prevent the removal of a child when possible. He referred to the caseworkers' need for increased skills to talk directly with parents about drug and alcohol issues.

He agreed with the panel's position on the need for more flexibility with repeat reports but such flexibility would be hard to implement. This is a federal and state issue. ACS does not have the authority it needs to implement such flexibility. He disagrees with the recommendation regarding Emergency Children's Services taking over a case at the end of the day. It is far better for the children to remain with one caseworker than to be handed off to another stranger. What is needed is for the courts to be accessible by phone into the evening hours. To insure compliance, he regularly tracks a practice change having to do with children being dropped off at the field office instead of the Children's Center. He also agrees with recommendations having to do with placing a child with a non-respondent parent, giving kin a choice of becoming a custodial parent or a foster parent, monitoring adoption subsidies although local districts do not have such authority, legislation regarding restoration of TPRs under certain circumstances, and restricting the time the agency spends on court ordered investigations. He has already informed the court that ACS will only do an investigation if there is an issue of abuse or neglect. He agreed to look into the practice of having medical exams conducted on children at discharge.

Regarding the Panels' statewide recommendations he stated his strong disagreement to changes in anonymous reporting and educational neglect reporting. Vera Institute's report requires further investigation and data. He believes there are better choices for making improvements than eliminating a full category of allegations. The SCR could do more inquiry when a report is made. He gave examples of the Nixzmary case which originally came in as an educational neglect report and the situation for immigrant teens brought to this country to work. He agreed that schools do need to do more and need to link to preventive services. He stated his agreement with many of the other recommendations made in the panel report though he has some worries

about each. Many questions regarding ACS progress with addressing disproportionality and disparities were answered.

Child Safety conferences are up and running in Manhattan. During the first six months of holding these conferences, the rate of removal has fallen 10%. Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Bronx have begun these conferences recently and Queens will start this summer. Safety conferences are attended by a trained facilitator, a parent advocate from CWOP or CFR, community service representatives, and family members with their support networks; 90% of the time consensus is reached at these conferences.

Panel members asked to be informed when practice changes are made and suggested the need for a virtual parenting education campaign. They agreed to hold their next meeting at the Children's Center and invite Chancellor Tisch to the meeting. Panel Co-Chairs have scheduled a meeting with Commissioner Carrion to talk further about the panel report. Thank you letters will be sent to the legislator and Executive Chamber related to the enacted budget. Advocacy letters will be sent to those involved with approving the city budget. David Lansner agreed to draft policy briefs on Emergency Removals and Education Neglect for circulation to panel members. The panel also agreed to forward a recommendation for judges to be on call to the NYC Court Reform Task Force.