GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY PLAN (October 20, 2021)

The New York State Council on Children and Families (CCF) plays a unique role in state government, helping to coordinate the state's health, education and human service systems and to facilitate and centralize access to information and resources to comprehensively support children, youth and families in New York. CCF is a small state agency, composed of the commissioners and directors of member state agencies[1], whose charge is to convene its member agencies and provide a coherent set of recommendations to the Governor on cross-systems issues. In addition, CCF continually strives to make relevant information involving children and families more readily available and accessible to its CCF-member agencies and the general public.

1. <u>REVIEW OF CCF'S CURRENT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT</u>

Key CCF staff reviewed agency practices to engage the public that presently are being implemented. Based on this review, the following were identified as CCF's current public engagement efforts.

<u>Meetings</u>: CCF holds monthly cross-systems meetings with senior staff from member state agencies and with family and youth partners as active participants. These monthly meetings provide a forum to exchange information and to discuss policies. While CCF has no meetings that are subject to the Open Meetings Law, the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) quarterly member meetings are open to the public and posted on the ECAC website (see www.nysecac.org/events). CCF also holds quarterly meetings associated with federal grants - the federal Preschool Development Birth through Five grant (see here) and the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Impact Initiative State Advisory Team (see here) and posts the PowerPoints and other pertinent information from these meetings on the CCF website.

<u>Newsletters:</u> CCF communicates with the public by issuing newsletters on a regular basis to provide updates on work and to engage the public. These newsletters are widely distributed and posted on the CCF website. For an example of a NYSB5 newsletter see here.

<u>Surveys and Interviews to Solicit Public Feedback</u>: CCF solicits feedback on programs that impact children and families. Currently, CCF is soliciting feedback on early care and education programs by conducting surveys and interviews with key stakeholders. This work is funded by CCF's federal Preschool Development Birth through Five grant. The comprehensive *2019 New York State Birth through Five Preschool Development Needs Assessment* report can be found here and has been widely distributed to state agency partners, providers and families throughout New York State.

<u>Parent Advisory Council</u>: With federal Preschool Development Birth through Five grant funding, a Family Engagement Specialist was hired to, among other duties, form a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) to advise the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council. The PAC includes parents/guardians of children under 8 years old

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[1] CCF member agencies include: NYS Education Department, NYS Office of Children and Family Services, NYS Office of Mental Health, NYS Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports, NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, NYS Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, NYS Department of Labor, NYS Office for the Aging, NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs, and the NYS Department of Health.

who are helping to inform early care and education policies, working with the ECAC and other CCF-member agencies.

Website: CCF's website (www.ccf.ny.gov) provides easy access to information and key resources for children, families, providers, schools and government officials and allows for translation into 100 plus languages using Google translate. Notably, all CCF staff names and email addresses are provided on the CCF website, so the public can easily contact any of us. Additional examples of information that is easily accessible on the CCF website are the following:

- **New York State maps** that provide information about child care, after school programs, home visiting, Head Start/Early Head Start, public libraries, farmers markets, career centers, mental health resources, family and peer supports and much more can be found [here](#).

- **The NYS Parent Portal** (www.nysparenting.org) integrates four CCF websites into one gateway website and they are: 1) **Every Student Present**, https://www.everystudentpresent.org/, an effort between the State Education Department and CCF to remind parents and families of the importance of children attending school including the definition of chronic absence in which students miss 10% or more of instruction; 2) **NYS Multiple Systems Navigator**, https://www.msnavigator.org/, a website built to help youth, family members and caregivers navigate multiple child and family-serving systems to gather information on the supports and resources readily available throughout the state; 3) **NYS Child Care, Home Visiting and After School Programs Locator**, https://nyschildcare.org, provides information on child care, home visiting and after school programs in one easy-to-access location; and 4) **The NYS Parent Guide**, https://www.nysparentguide.org, a guide for the first five years of the parenting journey, designed for the mother or father (through birth, adoption, or foster care), grandparent, partner, family friend, aunt or uncle with parenting responsibilities, to reinforce that what we say and do in the role as a parent matters. CCF's NYS Parent Portal also links to resources from partners including the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH), the NYS Education Department (NYSED), the NYS Department of Health (DOH), the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), the NYS Parenting Education Partnership (NYSPEP), among others. View the NYS Parent Portal visuals here:

  NYS digital and social media examples.pdf

  In addition, the NYS Parent Portal consolidates COVID-19 resources, from CCF-member agencies, for parents and other caregivers, government officials (e.g., caseworkers) and providers working with families. Resources run the gamut from where to access services (food, child care, housing), guidance on mask wearing for children in care (child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, schools), services for children with disabilities, tips for parents during COVID-19 and news and resources from the NYS DOH and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (see [COVID-19 Resources for Parents](#)).

- Accessible data for the public and others is available on the **Kids' Well-Being Indicators Clearinghouse (KWIC) database** (see [here](#)). KWIC is a one-stop data warehouse designed to promote efforts to gather, plot and monitor children's health, education and well-being indicator data as a tool for policy development, planning and accountability. KWIC is used regularly by CCF-member agencies, county social services districts, county youth bureaus and others providing access to data resources; allowing users to chart, graph and map data; and giving users the ability to tailor data to fit their needs.

- **New York State Mentoring Program (NYSMP) (**www.ny.gov/programs/new-york-state-mentoring-program**)** is a statewide provider of mentoring program services. The NYSMP creates supportive mentor relationships for children in schools, foster care, and the court system. Mentors are positive role models who guide youth with respect, structure, and compassion to build positive life skills.

Graphics: CCF provides easy to understand overviews of CCF projects, such as the federal Preschool Development Birth through Five grant (see Infographic here) and cross-sector data about young children in New York State (see Early Childhood Fact Sheet here)

Social Media: CCF strategically uses social media to build awareness and widely share information and messages from CCF, CCF-member agencies and the Governor using Twitter (@nysccf), Facebook (www.facebook.com/NYSCCF), YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/user/NYSCCF), and LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com/company/nys-council-on-children-and-families.

Greatest Areas of Public Interest: The New York State Head Start Collaboration, the federal Preschool Development Birth through Five Grant initiative and the "Hard-to-Place/Hard-to-Serve" work of CCF are the areas of greatest interest based on an analysis of website use through Google Analytics.

FOIL Requests: FOIL inquiries are consistently acknowledged and responded to in less than five days and records are provided free of charge.

II. PLAN TO EXPAND TRANSPARENCY AND EXPECTED TIMELINE

Consistent with the articulated mission of Governor Kathy Hochul to bolster the transparency of state government, CCF is continually looking for new ways to share information, with families, providers and policymakers. The initiatives below will further these efforts by making information more accessible and to better engage the public to more effectively collaborate with government officials to promote healthy children, families and communities. The timeline for implementation is within the next six months (by April 2022) and largely will be supported by federal Preschool Development Birth through Five Grant funds.

Modernize the CCF Website to make it more useful, by having an easier-to-understand interface, improving the site's organization and navigation features and continuing to maintain the state's commitment to language access. Presently, CCF's website is undergoing a redesign and update to:

o Strengthen CCF's role as an information hub to guide and provide easy access to information for families, providers and government officials.

o Ensure that the most important information is very visible and familiar words, phrases and concepts are used. Given the amount of government jargon, a dictionary of terms may be needed, but the goal is for users to understand words, phrases, concepts on the CCF website, without needing a dictionary.

o Invite stakeholder and citizen involvement in initiatives and proposed program changes with a 'Get Involved' link, by clearly posting current opportunities for formal and informal participation (e.g., meetings, document review, etc.). Similarly, provide an opportunity for public feedback to be provided via a prominent "Submit Ideas" button on the CCF website or by polls or focus groups (in person or virtual) being conducted on certain topics using social media to help reach a larger and more diverse audience.

Draw on the Parent Advisory Council and the work of the Family Engagement Specialist to continue to solicit ideas about how to better engage and share information with the public. Similarly, rely on the network and expertise of the New York State Mentoring Program staff and volunteers to reach and engage more youth.

Conduct an environmental scan and report key performance metrics to promote accountability. For instance, highly visible data could be posted on the number of children served by Head Start, child care, state-administered prekindergarten, home visiting programs, etc.

Update and regularly post interagency data and maps to answer key policy questions related to children and families. For instance, CCF helped create child care desert maps to distribute American Rescue Plan Act funds and in the future plans to use maps to further identify areas with a high number of children living in poverty, experiencing food insecurity or who are unhoused, as well as to map service opportunities for children and youth in need of residential care (such as Residential Treatment Facilities licensed by the Office of Mental Health, Residential Treatment Centers licensed by the Office of Children and Family Services) and community-based services. In addition, out-of-state residential placement data will be uploaded using Open Data NY.

Expand the NYS Parent Portal to include information on the New York State Mentoring Program and enhance the CCF NYS Parent Portal mobile app (available for Apple and Google users) to be integrated with push notifications for each of the NYS CCF websites. Notifications will be set up by the user's preferences and delivered by an automatic database that categorizes the notifications by age group (pregnant/expecting families, infant to 1 year, 1 to 2 years, 2 to 3 years, 3 to 4 years and 4 to 5 years). Each age group will receive corresponding and age-appropriate notifications for their self-assigned age bracket based on the user's settings and notification selections. The goal of integrating push notifications within the Parent Portal mobile app is to provide helpful parenting and caregiver tips that the user can easily access via their mobile device. In addition, the Parent Portal and Parent Portal Mobile App will be widely advertised as part of the *Talking Is Teaching* media campaign with an emphasis on the "Let's Talk About Parenting" theme.

> *Talking is Teaching* is a research-based, free public awareness and action campaign that helps parents and caregivers realize the importance of talking, reading, singing and playing to improve school readiness. Using books, text messaging, social media and information from experts, *Talking is Teaching* empowers parents and caregivers with fun and easy ways to improve their babies' learning. https://talkingisteaching.org/

III.   MEASURES OF SUCCESS AND LONG-TERM MONITORING

CCF will monitor changes that are implemented by the CCF transparency plan by:

- o Tracking use of the CCF website, using Google Analytics
- o Conducting brief surveys of the public about access to information provided by CCF
- o Tracking the number of Push Notifications provided to parents and caregivers via the NYS Parent Portal App
- o Reviewing FOIL queries to see if there are common record requests that can be answered by posting additional information on the CCF website
- o Implementing an annual survey to gather feedback and measure parent engagement through the Parent Advisory Council

This ongoing plan to monitor success will help to ensure that our initiatives are serving to increase transparency and expand opportunities for public access to information and participation in government meetings and decision-making.