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NOFA Listening Session: Early Childhood Educator Feedback

July 19, 2017, 6:30pm-8:30pm

City College of San Francisco, 50 Phelan Ave, San Francisco, CA 94112, Multi-Use Building Rm. 140

The San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education (OECE) held the NOFA listening session in order to gather feedback around the application and award process for the new Early Learning Scholarship (ELS). Approximately 150 early childhood educators attended. After a group welcome, participants were split into discussion groups by language. Discussions were facilitated by a combination of OECE Citizen's Advisory Committee members and OECE staff. Feedback will be used to inform any future NOFA development, and to improve services to the sector. The following feedback was gathered:

Question 1: What worked well with the NOFA process?

Cantonese

- Providers received a higher reimbursement rate.
- Now able to participate in Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) rating system.
- More opportunities to serve children with city voucher.
- Clear quality requirements from the city and work on the improvement plan.

English

- Worked together.
- Meetings to come together.
- Worked by giving yourself enough time and having a book keeper.
- Networking opportunities and offered many dates.
- Always able to reach Dawn (Children's Council of San Francisco).
- Having a choice to do it manually.
- Good for the City to open funding to the field.
- Helpful to answer the questions.
- Happy to hear about teacher pay.

- Multi-lingual access.
- Accessibility- meetings to try and help.
- Acknowledgement email of applications.
- Glad funding agreement was followed up on.
- Good to turn in agreements at meeting.
- Responsiveness-people focused.
- Frequently asked questions.
- Website was helpful as a resource.
- Having electronic and paper forms available.
- Multiple ways to get info.
- Improvement on food.
- Effort to provide assistance-points for trying.
- Polite customer service.
- Quality components for improvement, high quality motivations.
- Seeing the NOFA score report.

Mandarin

- OECE is willing to listen and seeks opportunities for improvement.
- Multi-lingual information.
- Information accessible online.
- FCC's have the opportunity to join the FCC Quality Network.
- Some requirements are good to better serve the child. For example, observation requirement.

Spanish

- Help and support with confusing questions on the NOFA application (Children's Council of San Francisco and Wu Yee Children's Services).
- An opportunity to help more families.
- A new experience for us.
- Help with answering our questions.
- Help from Children's Council of San Francisco with filling out the NOFA application in groups.
- Help within and across the early care provider community.
- The NOFA application was available in three languages (English, Spanish, Chinese).
- Staff was available to help the early care providers with the application; providers were able to pick up an application in person, submit it by mail or by email.
- Notice was given to providers about the benefits and incentives of applying.
- Nothing worked well.
- Availability of staff to answer our questions.

- The City acknowledged the needs of providers (more funding, quality programs, teacher professional development).
- Received help from Children’s Council with how to fill out the NOFA application and other forms.
- Clear instructions for filling out the forms were provided.

Question 2: What didn’t work well with the NOFA process?

Cantonese

- The ELS application instructions were not clear, too confusing.
- Transition Funding is not a fair funding system, and ELS Reserved award is not a reasonable funding type.
- From receiving NOFA application to submitting the application, providers did not have enough time to digest all NOFA information.
- There was a lot of paperwork for the application.
- It is not realistic to score the ELS application based on the written information.
- The translation was not good, and lots of FCC providers did not understand the meaning.
- FCC owners are facing lots of stress and administration burden, and they have to attend the trainings and meetings without any pay.
- FCC providers are not in the mood to work because the ELS funding is not fair.
- FCC providers do not understand the ELS Reserved enrollment process.
- The electronic sign-in is not easy to implement on site.
- Some FCCs were used to receiving C-Wages, and this type of funding is not available any more. Under ELS funding system, FCCs felt they received less funding from the City.
- QRIS assessment tool is only available in English, not in any other languages.
- FCC providers did not understand how to complete the NOFA application, and their FCCQN coaches misled them. Therefore, FCC providers could only guess the meaning when completing the application.
- Providers who did not get QRIS score didn’t get any points on criteria 1 on the application. It is not fair.
- Because the language of the ELS application instructions was not clear, FCCs didn’t fill out the full information on the form. As a result, FCCs did not receive the ELS funding as high as they thought. Based on the current ELS funding awards, some FCCs’ real income is decreased.
- The ELS rate is a higher rate, but the funding relates to the actual enrollment. No enrollment = no funding.
- Children who are qualified to receive ELS Reserved, are asked to transfer to another FCC provider who get the ELS Reserved award. It is not fair to other ELS qualified FCC providers.
- Each Integrated Service Agency (Wu Yee & Children’s Council) has their own administration system, and FCC providers do not know what and how to follow.
- Part-time rate is less than before.

- The enrollment process is so slow. FCC providers, who got ELS Reserved award, will get referrals from SF3C first. All other ELS qualified FCC providers have to wait until all the ELS reserved slots are filled.
- Some FCCs get ELS Reserved, Transition Funding, and 35% C-wages extra payment. This is not fair to other FCC providers.
- Before FCC providers submitted their ELS application, they had questions and concerns, but they did not know where they could get answers.
- FCCs requested to have ELS Reserved, and only a few of them received this award. How did the office decide which FCCs got this award?
- Because many new FCCs do not have FCCQN coaches, they didn't get any support to fill their application. As a result, they didn't complete the application correctly.
- The system of calculating the 35% C-wages extra payment is not fair. The office only used the amount in December 2016 to calculate the payment.
- There is a big gap between ELS Center rate and ELS FCC rate.
- The ELS funding policies affect the FCC's income directly. The policy making did not involve FCCs' input.
- Some FCCs received 35% C-Wage extra payment and transition funding, but some FCCs only received one of them.
- It is not a fair funding system. Some FCCs got more than two ELS funding types, but some FCCs only got ELS enhancement rate. How did the office make the ELS funding decisions?
- Some FCCs asked the same questions in different info session meetings before the NOFA application, and they did not get the same answer from each meeting. FCCs understood it is a new system, but that cannot be used as an excuse all the time.
- FCCs filled out the application based on their writing skill, and office scored the application based on the answers. It is not fair that the Office made the funding decisions based on the score of each application. The funding decisions should include site visits.
- Some FCCs received ELS Reserved and Transition Funding, and some FCCs only received ELS Reserved. Why didn't these FCCs receive the same ELS funding?
- Transition funding requirements were not described clearly on the application instructions, so many FCCs did not apply for this funding type.
- PFA program is not going to accept any new applications, and it is not fair to the new FCC providers.
- OECE hosted many evening meetings, but some FCC providers still could not attend due to their business hours. OECE should also host some meetings on the weekends.
- The office considers a full-day to be 8 hours, but some FCC's are open for 9-10 hours.

English

- Needed lots of extra help and time.
- Confusing/lots of guess work.
- No answers to questions.
- Complex and didn't know what we were getting in to.

- Confusing what we were awarded and why.
- Lack of clarity around why some got things and others got different things.
- Uncertain whether qualified.
- Technical glitches.
- Difficult for providers in subsidized housing to apply (income eligibility).
- Waivers/allowances needed for families especially in subsidized housing.
- Not enough time even if prepared (e.g. attended meetings).
- Need longer period to apply.
- Confusion between centers and FCCs.
- Info sessions did not always help (still confused).
- FCC confused as to whether to apply as center or FCC.
- Award letter was confusing- not clear on next steps (you have a certificate and not an award).
- Even more confusing for new providers.
- Unclear about different subsidy types.
- Whole system is confusing.
- FCCs left out, focus was on centers, separate groups by provider time.
- Additional technical assistance for Title 5 providers.
- More user friendly online app.
- Waiting for children (vacant spaces).
- New providers haven't been connected.
- Happened too fast.
- Conflicting information.
- PFA confusion, can't budget and not sure what to do with current children.
- Finding out info after the fact.
- Signing contract without knowledge of what it means.
- Who answers questions and makes decisions?
- Confusion about CDE contract earning and impact on funding.
- Cocoa training: some were not able to attend, process was inflexible, awardees trained first (should be all inclusive).
- Stressful.
- Lack of understanding of how to run a center.
- Concern about consistency across language groups.
- Hearing different things in different places.
- Crazy confusing, then scoring was unfair, a 'test' we couldn't pass.
- Assessment fatigue; wasn't clear.
- NOFA timing out of sync with enrollment process.
- Can't now self-select from SF3C.
- Can't turn away children, must enroll.
- Multiple meetings.
- Attended workshop, but no one could answer questions.

- Different answers to same questions and/or sending along to other people.
- Not enough information.
- Misinformation, “right hand and left and coordination.”
- PFA concerns about PFA rate, tuition credit policy.
- Misunderstanding transition funding.
- Misunderstanding, ELS moderate vs transition funding.
- Dishonest, not getting the truth.
- Mismatch between PFA enrollments and funding awarded.
- Not enough information to plan properly, would have applied differently if information had been clear.
- Too much transition without enough information.
- Unfair application process.
- Lack of reserved, transition funding.
- Concern about OECE hearing Chinese provider voice.
- Concern about consistency across language groups.
- Consistency of translation.
- Concern about legality of translation.

Mandarin

- Application form was difficult to understand.
- Consultants from Wu Yee and Children's Council did not even fully understand the application.
- Concerns about different reimbursement rates.
- Concerns about Reserved and Transition rates.
- Centers receive a higher rate than FCCs, while FCCs have a lot more costs than Centers.
- Centers are eligible for full-day rate, while FCCs are only eligible for part-day rate.
- Centers are competing with FCCs. Centers are taking children away from FCCs.
- Reserved slots are creating a lot of challenges. Some FCC providers actually take a loss from Reserved slots.
- Transition slots were only granted to some FCCs. Unfair to others.
- Relatively newer FCC providers are not only learning how to receive funding, but also how to recruit children. FCCs do not have access to SF3C.
- Digital sign-in and online documentation is not user friendly.
- 4-digit passcode sign-in requirement is not realistic especially when a child may have multiple elders dropping off and picking up.

Spanish

- Many changes to the application, and having to fill it out again.
- Some questions on the application were not clear or understandable.
- Wrong translation.

- Award letter was confusing (“Congratulation’s, but there are not enough funds for all children”).
- Use more language that is easier to understand, less technical.
- Translation issues during the NOFA help sessions.
- The application was not translated correctly, many errors.
- The translated information was not the same across English and Spanish, specifically in the family income range tables.
- Lack of knowledge and preparation among providers for how to apply (ex: using the Excel enrollment form).
- The PFA program lost C-WAGES, no increase in PFA rates, and no more PFA enhancement funds.
- PFA payments were late and there was no update given on that, and OECE staff was not on the same page.
- Providers are no longer able to pull children they wish to enroll from SF3C.
- Wu Yee has not paid us to this day.
- The assistance received by Children’s Council’s on the application was inadequate and they did not have complete information about the process.
- The elimination of C-WAGES will affect the quality of our programs.
- Many FCCs did not apply for the NOFA due to a lack of familiarity with the system and technical assistance.
- How the C-WAGES final payment was distributed was not equitable, the program was abruptly ended.
- Not all who applied received funding, and the percentage of those who applied and received funding is less than half?
- Providers who applied and did not apply lost funding.
- The NOFA has now slowed down the enrollment process for children we will serve.
- The process and the time it took to complete.
- The NOFA has greatly impacted FCCs, and their quality will be negatively impacted.
- How Transition Funding was awarded was not made clear, we want to know who received it and what the criteria were.
- Too many versions of the NOFA were released because of corrections made, caused confusion among providers.
- NOFA application translation was not clear, bad translation.
- NOFA form was missing the race/ethnicity box for one of the questions asked.
- NOFA and enrollment form level of comprehension was too complex for providers, some do not know how to use Excel, or project earnings and losses.
- Appeal process was not communicated clearly and some providers didn’t know about the process.
- Scoring mechanism was flawed and many providers were not satisfied with the scores they received and felt they deserved a higher score because of their experience in the field.
- Unclear instructions for the NOFA.
- Wu Yee and Children’s Council were not on the same page, they provided incorrect information.
- The Quality Network Coaches were not well informed about the ELS, which caused confusion among providers- they need training.

- The instructions for filling out the section on transition funding were confusing.

Question 3: What can OECE do to improve its future NOFA processes?

Cantonese

- OECE website should provide other language options.
- The Office can provide on-line video to show the application instructions, so FCCs can review it anytime.
- FCC providers still need to work when they are sick. OECE could provide sub teachers to FCCs as needed.
- Can OECE explain the ELS Reserved funding requirements? Many FCCs applied for this funding type, but only a few of them got this award.
- OECE should share the process of decision making. The requirements and procedure should be transparent.
- Center child care and FCCs should be treated the same.
- OECE can better communicate with FACES SF and verify the process of joining their network.
- Not all FCCs are aware of all the services and/or programs that are provided by Children's Council or Wu Yee. For example, an FCC already joined the FCCQN network, but this FCC did not know anything about SF3C. FCCQN coaches are not helpful. For example, an FCC provider wants to clarify a concern from his coach, but his coach's info was so outdated.
- Children's Council and Wu Yee should train their new staff before they start the job.
- FCC owners should have 2 weeks paid vacation and health insurance, just like their employees.
- Electronic sign-in/out is not useful, and FCCs have a hard time to implement the system on site.
- OECE can explain the ELS funding decisions process with the FCCs, so FCCs will understand why they did not get ELS Reserved or Transition Funding.
- OECE should post all information in three languages, English, Spanish, and Chinese at the same time.
- OECE can develop QRIS classes in Chinese, so Chinese speaking FCCs will pass the QRIS assessment.
- Children's Council could arrange meetings with FCC providers regarding the ELS enrollment process.
- OECE can host community meetings based on Districts, and schedule meeting in different dates and times. Can OECE schedule meetings on weekends?
- All FCC providers should have coaches, especially new FCC providers. Regarding ELS policies and procedures, all FCC providers should receive the same information either from Children's Council or Wu Yee.
- OECE can combine ELS Reserved and ELS Voucher as one funding type. It could help to reduce the confusion.

- FCC providers always seek more supports from Wu Yee or Children's Council, especially when FCC providers need assistance to fill out forms or get updated information.
- OECE can have a hotline for the FCC providers.
- OECE should make the final decision first, and then host community meetings to announce the decisions. Otherwise, it is going to waste FCC providers' time. For example, the ELS rate kept changing and FCCs got really confused about what the real ELS rate was.
- OECE could work with Children's Council to improve the ELS enrollment process. FCCs who received ELS Reserved haven't enrolled any new children.
- The COCOA system does not help to reduce any administration burden for FCCs. In fact, FCCs felt extra burden.
- Staff from Children's Council and Wu Yee should be able to answer FCCs questions.

English

- Set up contact for 1:1 to discuss award.
- No mistakes in award letter.
- Need to be able to reach someone to get questions answered.
- More time to fill application out.
- Need 1:1 support for application (group does not always work).
- Be clear right from the start (including impact after NOFA).
- Clear line of authority.
- Need to have facts up front to make decisions.
- More outreach (some educators/providers don't know or understand ELS and the implications).
- Suggestion to have reserved be voucher based.
- Preschool plus worked.
- Concern about how to achieve continuity: example of continuity of kid with fee increases.
- Lost enrollments due to timing mismatch of funding needs.
- Need more support for filling out NOFA, technical support in application.
- Forms need to be the same.
- Concern about 10 day best interest policy.
- Concern about provisional enrollment children.
- Suggestion to re-open NOFA next year because of mistakes.
- Want flexibility to meet changing demographics in neighborhoods or programs.
- Spaces will go unfilled, due to timing, concern about inequity.
- Input was not taken, sessions were too broad.
- Process of input, modifications made (cycle of input).
- Hold focus groups with experienced providers. Example of previewing NOFA.
- Concern about amount of funding on letter.

Mandarin

- OECE should be more fair and transparent.
- Better understanding of the rate and eligibility to receive funding.
- Better understanding of different rate for different categories (Reserve, Transition, etc.).
- Offer higher rate for targeted population such as homeless, special needs.
- Simplify application form.
- Improve digital signature.
- Import family information directly from the Quality Network (Wu Yee and Children's Council) rather than having to manually re-enter.
- Chinese Language support.
- Provide shared resources in Chinese, example: Standard form template in Chinese. Ex. Parent consent form, ASQ in Chinese, DRDP in Chinese.
- Provide more information sessions (during application and feedback session like today) in Chinese.
- Need training on ASQ, DRDP, DRDP-Tech.

Spanish

- Provide updates to the application at an in person gathering.
- Do not change the application once it's completed.
- Use more language that is simpler and easier to understand.
- If an application that was submitted had errors, return it to the provider so that they may correct the errors and resubmit.
- Notify the providers of any application changes.
- Is it possible to bring back the C-WAGES program?
- Tell us who makes the funding decisions.
- Be more transparent who the application reviewers were, who chose them.
- Reviewing panels should be diverse and include FCCs, teachers, and parents.
- The advance payment should be allowed to be repaid within 10 months, and not within 5 months.
- Treat FCCs as the professionals that they are.
- The application deadline should have been in January, and the application should have opened earlier.
- The PFA grace period changed from 8 weeks to 4 weeks, and this will impact providers.
- Children's Council and Wu Yee need to be on the same page.
- Translations should be done in simple language.
- The applications should have been separated (one for ELS, one for PFA).
- Have qualified staff provide correct information about the application.
- Divide info sessions and meeting into smaller groups, and have providers register ahead of time to maintain small groups.

- Have separate applications for PFA providers, centers, and FCC, and not lump them into one single application.
- The Excel enrollment form was too long and did not print properly when printing it out.
- Many providers do not have or do not understand Excel. A PDF version of the enrollment form would have been better.
- The NOFA could have been informed by people with knowledge of the field and experience in the field, there could be a focus group to inform decisions.
- Dollar amounts should not be on the letter, it created challenges when parents saw it.

Other Feedback and Questions

- Can Children's Council and Wu Yee send the list of requests for continuity children to providers?
- Providers should be able to get reimbursed for Reserved spaces that have not yet been filled.
- If after 1 month, a Reserved slot is not yet filled, can a provider fill it with a voucher child or a private pay family?
- The subsidy specialists instruct providers to call families to schedule a site tour, and at times the providers do not have the time to do that.
- Call us educators, not providers.
- What is the process now to enroll children in open spaces?
- How will the quality grant be paid – by check or as income?
- Can our questions be considered and included in this session?
- Filling Reserved slots has taken too long and the process should be more flexible.
- SF3C's matching process takes too long and causes the FCC to lose money.
- Filling reserved slots with homeless families is risky because of the family circumstances.
- Is the reimbursement based on "attendance" or "enrollment"? People are so worried that digital signature will result in missing attendance record and then losing funding.
- Do private-pay families need to sign the consent form? Some parents are questioning why they need to provide the information since they are private pay.
- Two relatively new providers (within 2-years) did not receive NOFA.