

Miriam Calderon and Katie Hamm

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Missy Coffey: Hello and welcome to Early Childhood Policy Matters. I'm Missy Coffey, senior principal education researcher and director of the PDG B-5 Center with SRI Education. Today, we're discussing the role played by the federal government to support states as they strengthen early childhood care and education systems and offer mixed delivery options for parents. We are happy to welcome Miriam Calderon, deputy assistant secretary for policy and Early Learning in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education with the U.S. Department of Education. Thanks so much for joining us, Miriam.

Miriam Calderon: Hi, Missy, thanks so much for having me.

Missy Coffey: And we're also speaking with Katie Hamm, deputy assistant secretary for early childhood development with the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It's a pleasure to have you, Katie.

Katie Hamm: Thanks, Missy, I'm really glad to be here today.

Missy Coffey: So to start, can you share more about the role, Ed, and HHS, in this administration and how the departments are working together to realize the president's vision for early childhood programs?

Katie Hamm: Yeah, that's a that's a great question, you know, I think when it comes to early childhood policy, the Department of Education and Health and Human Services have huge roles to play. When we think about what young children need and what their families need, and we think about K-12 education and YDA services that exists in the Department of Education. And then we think about the human services, like home visiting services to families that exist at HHS. It's really important that we have both of those components at the table. And so it's really important that we are partnering on things like preschool development grants, as well as across all the programs that affect children and families. So I've been thrilled to have Miriam as a partner in this. We know that our teams have a long history of working together, and we're really excited that as

we think about what comes next for early childhood and putting big plans into action, that we have a structure and a system where we can work across departments to accomplish the goals that we have for young children.

Miriam Calderon: Thanks, Katie. I, I just really want to echo all that Katie said, I think that this collaboration across ED and HHS to accomplish the incredibly bold vision that our administration has for young children and families is absolutely critical. -I think it's critical to recognize that some of that capacity and that work within the Department of Education wasn't very consistent in the last administration. And we know that that's an important part of I think what I see my role is that Ed is to build back a lot of that coordination internally within ED and to really be able to be a strong partner to the Department of Health and Human Services This vision will have such an impact on public education in the United States so it's critical, I think, that education be an important part of this. And we know that when I think about this vision, too, and we think about how this work aligns across ED and HHS, we know that in states this work happens, right? It's education and health. and we have invested in governance structures and states like state advisory councils for over a decade now. You know, in programs like PDG, we are very clear that, you know, the work has to happen across various sectors, right. To be able to support and meet the comprehensive needs of children and families, as Katie talked about. And so that that extends to the federal level as well. And so I think our work and our goal is both around implementation of this exciting vision and to bring, I think, bring back a lot of the work that where we coordinated policy and we looked across how we do the work to integrate and align across all of the programs-that exist at HHS.

Missy Coffey: That's great, and can you say more about the administration's goals for early care and education?

Katie Hamm: Yeah, I think I think it's a really exciting time for early childhood, because it does feel like we could be on the cusp of the largest investment this country has ever seen. We started with the American Rescue Plan Act to help the early childhood sector recover from the pandemic and address some of the financial disruption. So in March, we had a 40 billion dollar investment just in child care and Head Start to help the sector recover. And now when we think about the long term needs and what comes next, what

the president has put on the table as part of his build back better agenda and the American families plan is a four hundred and fifty billion dollar investment over 10 years in preschool and child care for children birth through five. It's just it's such a needed investment. It just represents a huge leap forward for our field to have a president who is putting this plan on the table. I think one of the really important things about the plan is that it leads with the early childhood workforce and compensation and addressing wages and understanding that if we don't get wages right, if we don't make sure that the people doing this work are well compensated, regardless of whether they work in a family, child care home or a school, that we're not going to address some of the chronic issues that we've had in building towards that high quality system. So one of the things that is true in both the child care program and the preschool program is that we have to have wages. The second piece and very related to wages is quality. So what the president envisions is high quality programs that really support children with the experiences that they need to be successful to learn again, regardless of what we call that setting, we want to make sure our children have all of the things that they need, like low ratios, adults who are well trained to help support their development, inclusive settings for children with disabilities, making sure we're specific about what dual language learners need and how we support them across settings as well. So that's the vision that the Build Back Better Plan strives for, to get a little bit more specific, it proposes two hundred and fifty billion for child care, and that includes child care assistance for all families earning up to one point five times their state's median income. So that would mean roughly seventy five percent of children would be income eligible for child care assistance. That's a huge change. And the preschool side, there'd be universal preschool available to all three and four year olds regardless of income. Really important to underscore mixed delivery is part of that. So it would include family. Child care would include child care centers. It includes Head Start programs and schools, ensuring that parents really have a choice of which setting works best for them. And we're making sure that all settings are offering high quality preschool to children. And regardless of whether it's through preschool or child care, the same quality and wage goals apply. So it's hard to overstate what a change this would be for our early childhood system and how well we would be able to support programs and providers in doing what they need to do and just have been under-resourced for way too long to be able to accomplish.

Miriam Calderon: That was great, thanks, Katie. I would just add I guess a couple points to that. One I think is that building sort of from the Department of Education side and thinking about starting from the American Rescue Plan, there have been also historic investments made in public education in the K-12 system to really support children being able to return to in-person learning, which we know is absolutely critical for our youngest learners. In particular, much of what we know is so important for children's learning and development and how they learn is particularly challenging to do, virtually. We've seen important investments in Part C and Section 619 of IDEA the disruption to services during COVID. You know, in particular for reaching children with developmental delays and disabilities has been significant and particularly challenging. Identifying children, ensuring evaluations happen and then thinking about what service delivery looks like right in a virtual environment. And so these resources are critical. We at the same time, you know, when we talk about the Build Back Better plan and the agenda, the goal isn't to get back to the system that we had pretty Covid. And, you know, that is the historic moment I think that we've all, you know, been waiting for and which I think is in front of us right now with this incredibly bold proposal. Right? It's to be able to build on these investments and think and work towards that more equitable system that won't really come without long term resources. Because what we really needed is much more systemic and transformational change and financing. And so I think that's the that's the bold vision before us. It's the immediate resources to stabilize our sector get supports to families, but ultimately transform early care and education in states' systems because, you know, that's what it's that's an essential part of lifting more families into opportunity. On the education side, as well, I would be remiss, Katie talked a lot about the workforce to not mention, I think, incredible, important opportunities to support our workforce around wages, but around more opportunity to remove the barriers to post-secondary education, open up more pathways for our early childhood educators to be able to go back and get degrees and to strengthen those programs and again, with an eye, especially towards equity. So the American Families Plan has a number of investments specifically around post-secondary ed. So thinking about, you know, investing in minority serving institutions and building up their capacity to recruit more educators and have strong programs, I'm thinking about that in high demand fields. So, again, bilingual educators, more educators with certification in early childhood and special education, I think are our opportunities that will see the proposed increases in the Pell Grant, which we know will be beneficial to our workforce in terms of some of, you know, with affordability, more investments and scholarships. And then, you know,

last but not least, free community college. And the proposal to add two years to the public education system On the back end. Is really, I think, opens up doors to being able to create more partnerships with institutions of higher education and early childhood professional development, workforce development systems and states. So that's also very exciting to think about as part of this work.

Missy Coffey: That is really exciting and it doesn't feel like a very unprecedented time and there's really an opportunity ahead of us here. So thank you both for sharing that. You've both mentioned at this point this idea of mixed delivery. And I'd love to hear a little bit more about why that's important to this administration and what role that plays in providing high quality care and education.

Miriam Calderon: We know now that the vast majority of states, when you look at, particularly when you think about preschool education systems and the work states have done over time, I think we're at almost 1.6 million children in the country served through their existing state preschool programs. The vast majority of them, I think all but one state, is delivering preschool through a mixed delivery system. So there's just a practicality, I think, part of this to know is that this is the way the field has moved, right? In child care and preschool and early care and education, we need to be able to take advantage of all of the opportunities, partners, people who have been doing this work and expertise, the settings where children already are and being able to support building quality and getting more children and, you know, access to those services. And there's also a really important quality part to this, too. And I think looking at the needs of families and honoring their choices as well. On the quality side, high quality early care and education for infants, toddlers and preschool those can happen in a variety of settings, right? There's no one setting that specifically, like, holds all the key or, you know, the has the market on, this is what we know where the highest quality can happen. I've been in phenomenal family child care homes in Oregon. We invested in our mixed delivery system for preschool. We had a pretty even distribution of slots across community-based organizations, Head Start, public schools and family child care homes. And, you know, that is a big take away and lesson learned for me as I went around the state. You know, I saw quality early childhood education and preschool instruction and services happening in all of those settings. Right. It was a matter of is it resourced? Is the workforce supported? Is there technical assistance? Right? I would love to see our field start shifting more in terms of asking the question of, is it mixed

delivery, will it be mixed delivery? And instead start to ask ourselves like, well, it is mixed delivery. So how do we support quality across a mixed delivery setting and what's that going to take to do well, because I think that's the work that we have to do at the federal level and in supporting states and to support and states are doing that work and communities are doing that work. And then how do you actually build capacity in communities so that families could take advantage of a mixed delivery system? And that means, you know, hopefully not braving the market. And, oh, there's so many providers and I'm sitting on multiple wait lists and applying in all these places, right? But what is that kind of infrastructure that will really help families navigate hopefully more quality choices and their communities that are affordable and accessible to them?

Katie Hamm: Yeah, I just want to underscore two points that Miriam made. One is that children are learning regardless of setting, they're learning from birth. We just know that because that's what the science tells us. And the second point is that quality can happen anywhere because it really comes down to how is the workforce treated? How is the program financed? Are there resources to support that quality? And I think those two pieces make mixed delivery really an imperative. And I come at this as a parent as well. I've had a child who's gone to preschool in a public school system. I've used child care centers. I've used home based care. And that's just been reflective of my family's needs. And working parents often need that full day, full year care that sometimes is more available. Some school systems have very robust preschool programs that are available to the entire neighborhood, and we were fortunate to be in that position. But I really think that it's so important that parents have choices and that we support the totality of the early childhood sector. I don't think it is news to anyone that if preschool is only in one place, it can kind of disrupt the rest of the market. So if you take three and four year olds out of child care programs and they go to public schools, then the child care market sometimes can't afford to operate because they rely on those children to make sure they can operate in the black and that can undermine infant and toddler care. So when we think about mixed delivery, we want to make sure we're talking not just about across different settings, but we're also thinking about that birth to five spectrum that is so important. And I think that's really reflected in the American Families Plan and what the president has proposed in the space.

Missy Coffey: Thank you both. I think that's a really nice connection between the work the states have been doing for a long time about bringing multiple programs and funding

streams together and this conversation about providing services in multiple settings and giving that option to parents. So I know that in some of the PDG states, this has been an ongoing conversation. So we'd love to hear what do you think the difference is and how would you describe the relationship between mixed delivery and the comprehensive early care and education system?

Miriam Calderon: I have come from, just the past four years, serving as the early learning system director in the state of Oregon. I think I'm particularly excited about the work that we did with our early learning council and our governor in Oregon to really get at this issue and just to draw on it from my perspective, the sort of comprehensive early childhood system is really where we think about the work across all of the sectors, where we think about the connections with health, with K-12, with human services, with public health, with, you know, we had housing increasingly playing a much bigger role in our council over the years and in our state strategic plan Raise Up Oregon, which was our five year birth to five kind of strategic plan. And so we thought about all of those sectors in the context of that work and PDG help support that. At the same time, we held space for the fact that the early care and education sector within that comprehensive early childhood system was the least resourced and most underdeveloped sector. So not to say that health or housing or K-12 has all of the resources, you know, that they need especially to be able to advance sort of more equitable opportunities. But the state of where access to preschool, quality, affordable child care was in our state. And I don't think Oregon is that different than so many other states in terms of we haven't financed early care and education sectors and systems in states, right? That's what is so incredible about this moment with the with the Build Back Better agenda and the proposed investments in early childhood that, you know, Katie laid out so well. That is sort of on the table right now where and we're all doing so much work to support. So that we talked about it is, you're we're not going to lift families into opportunity without early care and education, affordable, quality child care and preschool opportunities. And within that we thought very intentionally about, well, what are what is the funding? What is the financing? What is the support for the workforce? What is the infrastructure and capacity we need to build in communities to do more work in our own state, to be able to eliminate race income and zip code as predictors of who has access and who doesn't? So we were intentional and we held space within that bigger early childhood system vision and the work that our Early Learning Council led for a strong early care and education sector. Within that, mixed delivery, I think is the is

reflects the settings within the early care and education where children and families receive their services. And that gets that right to what we were, you know, just talking about is that quality can happen everywhere children are learning in all of those environments. And we need to be able to build a strong early care and education sector that can really support, you know, a mixed delivery system of providers and can get them those supports and create financing that touches all of those different environments. So that's the way I think about it. I found we were, in the context of Raise up Oregon, often we even in our own work, we could switch back and forth in the conversation and those terms and there wasn't necessarily shared understanding. And so, I think where we need to be: hold space for, we're not going to create more equitable opportunities for children and families and take advantage of the power of the of this this period of time in child development and human development, if we're not attending to the comprehensive needs of children and families. But necessary to that is a stronger early care and education sector that is mixed delivery.

Katie Hamm: I really think Miriam said that so well, and it's also inspiring to hear her talk about Oregon and just the thoughtfulness and what is possible when you kind of bring all of these pieces together. And what I heard her say that I think is a thread across mixed delivery and comprehensive early childhood systems is it really starts with what are the children in the family need? I agree that mixed delivery refers to a certain characteristic of the early childhood sector where we're thinking about where all the places that children are and what do they need and what their families need. And it's important that we have meaningful makes delivery that includes family child care. That includes that child care center, that includes schools, that includes Head Start. But equally important is what is that child and family need as a whole? They don't just need childcare and early education. They also have needs like health care and early intervention and financial supports that the kind of support the family and the community. So I think there's a distinction that's really important there. But it's also just incredibly important that we think about what a parents need, what a family is need and go from there in both spaces.

Missy Coffey: You've mentioned a couple of things the sector needs to be successful. Can you share a bit more about what early care and education as a sector needs to be successful?

Katie Hamm: I think in the early childhood sector. We're fortunate in that we know what we need to solve, for we know what it takes to make this sector really strong and we know that a lot of the places where the sector falls short, it has nothing to do with what we have amazing providers in the early childhood sector. We have parents who want the best for their children and we have children who are just wonderful in and of themselves. But we have a system that's been chronically under-resourced for so long that it's compromised quality. It's really push parents financially to the extent that many can't afford the programs that they want for their children. It hasn't allowed people who want to be in the sector to stay in the sector because they can't earn a living wage. So I really think it comes down to making sure we have the resources that we need to support quality, to support early educators with wages, with training, with credentials, and that we are not putting in place quality standards that are aspirational, that people don't have the resources to implement. And I think if we do those things, if we make sure that early childhood programs are treated like a public good and people have access to them and it doesn't matter if your parents can afford to pay for it, you can still go. If we do that, if we invest in compensation, if we invest in the workforce and make sure that people have the training and support that they need. And if we make sure that the financing that's available to early childhood providers reflects the quality standards that they're expected to attain. I feel like all of this is doable and attainable, and I feel like we're on the cusp of being able to really push towards that goal. But I you know, I think that what we're dealing with now is a series of really difficult choices that have been made over the course of decades because there hasn't been enough money in the system. And we pushed it all on to parents who are asked to pay astronomical prices and providers who are expected to work for very low wages to subsidize what should be something that is much more widely available to all children.

Miriam Calderon: Oh, I totally agree with everything Katie said, she said it really well. We have just needed a completely different way to approach financing. Very little public financing in the sector was just not allowing us to really make a lot of progress. There was a moment and where are during covid where our I was on a in a meeting with our head, the head of our K-12 schools in the state, and he said, you know, the Oregon Department of Education has existed for like one hundred years or something. And I just thought our early learning division had existed for going on eight. You know, and in some ways, that is such a microcosm of an example of what where the systems itself are. Until we have a right to early care and education in this country or we have a

significant or we shifted and talk about seeing it as a public good. As Katie outlined, a lot of the work, you know, we couldn't really take a step forward, I don't think, because our footprint was just so minimal in so many of the environments. And it was just really hard to make significant plays on quality workforce, on infrastructure capacity, things like standards, all the things that Katie talked about without first and foremost, just having significant more public financing. But there are some practical things that are needed, too. I mean, we need to build more leadership in states and more capacity in communities and in states to be able to operate these programs. I remember the summer before I first considered this opportunity in Oregon. There were five states, Oregon was one of them that were looking for a leader of their early, you know, their early care and education agencies, offices, departments. There are there's work happening in states and cities and counties. So this is growing. And I think a lot about who is coming in to lead in these and these and these important systems and these important roles. And that starts from administrators all the way down to your technical assistance providers, coaches, more educators that that will do the work to work directly with children. So I think as far as this opportunity matures, as more public financing comes in, as we take this important step right, to actually become a sector, we need to think about how we define this workforce at all levels. Right. Or going from the classroom all the way up. And what are our plans there? And then just incredible amount of infrastructure locally and in states, data systems, you know, mechanisms to bring funding streams together in blend and braid funding to address fragmentation in the field that really resulted from, I think, not having a more holistic view around how to finance these systems.

Missy Coffey: So you both have talked about the investments made in this sector. What should states be thinking about at this moment to prepare for the major investment in early childhood?

Katie Hamm: I think right now, you know, states have a lot of early childhood resources for the next couple of years with the American Rescue Plan, and those resources are really designed to address the financial disruption of the pandemic, but also help think about our recovery and recognizing that more investment in child care is really needed as part of that recovery. So increasing wages and compensation for the early childhood workforce, increasing provider payment rates that can help get towards the cost of quality, are limiting what families pay for child care so it's more reasonable relative to

their income, bringing more children into the child care assistance program. Those are all things that states can kind of start doing right now. Thinking about birth to five, who has access to programs helping providers improve the quality of those programs? Those are all things that states can do with the resources that they have right now to start building towards a longer-term change. That, as Miriam said earlier, will help us not just go back to what it looks like before the pandemic that really wasn't working for children first and foremost, but not for providers or families either. And think about what could be and lay the foundation for what could be.

Miriam Calderon: That's really well said, Katie. I would just add to that and kind of make two points. One is that, you know, to put a finer point on these resources now, I think one of the amazing things that's happening is because of the resources through the American Rescue Plan and particularly the support for child care, the child care sector, we have built relationships and gotten financing, I think, across states to providers that never receive public financing before. In Oregon we distributed, you know, over \$70 million in public funds to over 4,000 providers, the vast majority of whom had never received any public financing before. That's the future. Right. And so what barriers did we have to address to be able to help providers do that? How do we build from there, make those less administratively burdensome? So I think we've been able to put together some kind of dream policies, right? Lowering co-pays, increasing reimbursement rates and sort of those pieces and really looking at those things, how they're working, how they were implemented, operationalized, and what did we learn from that and how do we start building more capacity to be, I think, ready for this moment that it's so exciting and coming. The second thing I'll say point is governance. So we absolutely need and I think we've seen this in the past several years how critical this was. I think you should be thinking about governance and how are you elevating and understanding where all these different programs live and what are the structures to really be able to coordinate across? Because even within the early care and education sector, you have key programs in health, you have key programs and human services, you have key programs in the state education agency. Some of these are middle manager level positions. They're buried under multiple layers, right? And that's not the future. I think the future is. And you see it in states consolidating and creating their own state agencies. Part of that isn't just about bringing the programs together, it's also about increasing the authority and elevating -early care and education as its own sector within states and locally. And so I would also be looking at governance. Are you still

pretty fragmented? What are the relationships to coordinate across or how are all of these issues elevated? All of these strategic plans, needs assessments, because I think the future is really bringing a lot more of these together to be able to maximize this opportunity and these resources.

Missy Coffey: That's awesome, and I'm sure we could talk about this all day, and unfortunately, we'll have to leave it there. So thank you both for taking time to talk to us today. Really appreciate your expertise, Miriam and Katie. Thank you for making time.

Miriam Calderon: Thanks, Missy.

Katie Hamm: Thank you for having us.