

November 15, 2022

Dear Legislators of the Joint Education Committee:

As leaders of the state and members of the Joint Education Committee, we feel it's important to inform you of the negative impact the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) has had on Wyoming's Child Development Centers (CDCs) over the past two years and our concerns for the future of early intervention services for the children of Wyoming.

The CDCs have been serving children and families for over 50 years with much needed early intervention services (PT, OT, Speech, preschool, family service coordination, and more). It's evident that CDCs provide high quality services as reflected in the parent survey results showing satisfaction rates in the 90th percentile. It's important to note that the state and federal funding that the CDCs receive doesn't cover staff salaries and benefits, let alone operations. As nonprofits the CDCs strive to serve children uninterrupted with much needed services through donations.

Throughout the past two years, the WDE has made decisions that have had a negative impact on our programs, which in turn negatively impacts the children and families served. Such as:

1.) The WDE distributed the Part B 619 American Rescue Funds to school districts when the CDCs sign contracts with the state to be the sole providers of Part B 619. These funds were in addition to the millions of dollars the school districts already received in American Rescue Funding. The CDCs received \$0 in American Rescue Funds for Part B 619. The WDE is mandated to serve children ages 3-21 through IDEA, yet they did not provide for the 3-5-year-olds with American Rescue Funding. The CDCs were then made aware that the WDE gave over \$3.8M in American Rescue Funds to the Boys and Girls Clubs of the state which included \$2.5M to the Natrona County Boys and Girls Club. The CDCs must find donors to provide a Prox Talker for children that are nonverbal, interpreters, and more for special needs children, while the Boys and Girls Clubs, a nonprofit that the WDE is not mandated to fund, received millions of dollars. The CDCs have contacted Superintendent Schroeder, as well as Ms. Shelley Hamel at the WDE, but they have yet to provide an adequate response.

2.) The WDE recently sent a letter to school districts informing them that they can now provide Part B 619 services to children enrolled in the district preschools. How can this happen when the CDCs have signed the state contract to provide both Part C and Part B 619 services? **Why would WDE do this when they have publicly stated through legislation that this would not happen?** This would cause a loss of over \$1.2M to the CDCs operating budgets across the state, fragment the early intervention services children receive, as well as put a wedge in the relationships between the CDCs and school districts. The WDE did not notify the Department of Health's Behavioral Health Division who provides oversight of Part B 619 and Part C of this letter prior to sending it, nor were the CDCs, who are contractors, aware of this letter prior to it going to school districts. This is a duplication of services and unnecessary spending of federal and state dollars. If the school districts are allowed to provide early intervention services, this

will forever negatively impact Wyoming's CDCs and again the early intervention services that children receive.

3.) The WDE is mandating that the CDCs pay for preschool tuition for children that are served with outreach services (PT, OT, Speech, Cognitive Skill Development, and more) in the private setting. Therefore, not only do the CDCs have to pay for providers to deliver early intervention services in the private setting, but now must also pay for a child's private preschool tuition. K-12 districts do not have to pay private school tuition for children when it is parent's choice to enroll. Why would the CDCs pay for a child's private preschool tuition when placements are available at the CDC that the child can attend for free ensuring FAPE and a least restrictive environment? This will cost the CDCs across the state thousands of dollars each year to meet the mandate placed upon us.

4.) The WDE requires the CDCs special education teachers to have an Early Childhood Special Education Endorsement which is a two-year masters level endorsement that costs \$3,000-\$4,000 per year. The CDC teachers that have a Special Education Degree can't teach preschoolers 3-5 years of age without this endorsement. You can imagine how hard it is for the CDCs to recruit special educators with this mandate. Yet, the school district special education teachers can teach with a bachelor's degree only, without the endorsement requirement.

The list goes on from WDE requiring over 10 trainings in two months that staff are mandated to complete, guidance provided that doesn't follow guidance from national Speech, OT, PT Associations, and different expectations for the delivery of IDEA for the CDCs then from school districts.

Do you honestly want Wyoming's CDCs to not exist, and children/families be unable to receive much-needed early intervention services? If school districts were to deliver Part B 619 services, it will cost the state 3x the amount of funding that it takes for the CDCs to deliver early intervention services. It would harm the more than 700+ CDC employees across the state and the 3,500-4,000 children that the CDCs serve annually.

We are asking for your leadership and support to keep the WDE from causing the demise of Wyoming's CDCs that have served our state and most importantly the children of our state as nonprofits for over 50 years. Something must be done to stop the WDE from being so destructive and malicious towards a system that has proven successful for so many years. We are hoping, with new leadership at the WDE, positive change will occur, but it must also occur under your leadership.

We recognize that due to the federal funding for Part B 619 that flows through the WDE, the department must provide IDEA oversight to the CDCs as the 49th school district through the Department of Health's Behavioral Health Division. However, providing oversight does not mean hindering the delivery of services to children with special needs, withholding much needed funding from these programs, duplicating services within school districts, or placing unnecessary demands on the CDCs to not be viable for the future.

You, as leaders of this great state, have the ability to shape the education and services for Wyoming's children. Please ensure that the CDCs across Wyoming continue to make an imprint on children's lives to prepare them for success well into their future.

Sincerely,

Mitch Brauchie, Director, Region 1, Park, Big Horn Washakie, and Hot Springs Counties

Marsha Riley, Director, Region 2, Sheridan and Johnson Counties

Francie Gregory, Director, Region 3, Crook and Weston Counties

Patti Boyd, Director, Region 4, Teton and Sublette Counties

Shauna Lockwood, Director, Region 5, Lincoln and Uinta Counties

Courtney Hill, Director, Region 6, Fremont County

Lori Lucero, Director, Region 7, Sweetwater County

Jaime Stine, Director, Regions 8 & 11, Carbon and Albany Counties

Alisha Rone, Director, Region 9, Natrona County

Danielle Wondercheck, Director, Region 10, Converse, Niborara, Platte, and Goshen Counties

Bob Tranas, Director, Region 13, Campbell County

Laurene Hines, Director, Region 14, Wind River Reservation

CC:

Wyoming Department of Education

Wyoming Department of Health's Behavioral Health Division

Elected Superintendent Megan Degenfelder