Background Information for Think Tank on Planning,
Governance and System Building
Early Care and Education - NYC
February 7, 2008

This document provides some background on early childhood planning and system building around the country. Since mid-December, I have been studying these efforts for CCI, interviewing national experts and reading widely. This outline provides insights and lesson learned from those inquiries. Our goal at this meeting will be to work toward developing recommendations about how to jump-start a *sustainable process of system building* for early care and education in New York City.

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Themes and Potential Assumptions

The following themes came up repeatedly in my interviews and readings. Some of them could serve future planners as underlying principles and assumptions.

- Effective planning, system building, and governance works best as an **evolving process**. It is not possible, desirable, or necessary to design a system upfront. Especially at the beginning, a new system cannot be "preplanned" or crafted top down. The expectation is that there should be a focus on the process with a comfort level with learn as you go. Six states have established explicit learn-as-you-go policies for system building.

- **Goals for the ultimate system need to be clear and agreed-upon** – goals such as ready for school, fiscal efficiency, coordination between silos, parent support, poverty prevention, etc. As one interviewee put it, "If you plan to build a system, you **need to be clear about the reason it needs to be created**."

- There must be **motivated leadership**, either from the executive (preferred) or from another committed organization, individual or group.

- System building requires a **collaborative process with genuine input from all stakeholders**. It is important to bring people under a "new umbrella." Stakeholders in system building efforts in one state or another include: government agency administrators; elected officials; parents; representatives of prekindergarten, child care and K-12; teachers and administrators; individuals

from the business, pediatric, faith, higher education, media and law enforcement communities; health, mental health and human service experts; and those from foundations and the United Way.

- For collaboration efforts to be meaningful, participants must have a **high degree of authority to make decisions**. Since they are the ultimate decision makers government agency and legislative officials, especially, must be high level. To be truly meaningful, **collaboration must be required**.

- **Open and collegial communication** between and among planning and system building collaborators is essential. People and their relationships are key to the success or failure of system building.

- **Mechanisms to assure this communication must be built in** – regular meetings, forums, conferences; Smart.net in NC, listservs, video conferencing, etc.

- **Fiscal efficiencies** found during the system building and improvement process **need to be reinvested** in the overall early care and education system to improve quality.

- The planning and system building process itself requires **funding and staffing**. Some-*body* or *organization* must formally manage the planning process.

- The issue needs to be **framed in a comprehensive way** from the start. How the new system works for everyone must be made clear.

- **Public engagement and public awareness** are necessary to create momentum and develop support. Therefore, a **marketing strategy and recognizable name** are important to success. Vermont used *Building Bright Futures*; North Carolina, *Smart Start*; New York State advocates are *Winning Beginning NY*. NYC system building will require a name as well.

- **Communities know best the needs of *their* children and families**. System building works best when efforts and insights are *both* **top-down, and bottom-up**. The process must recognize the varying needs of communities.

- Begin **with a careful analysis of existing resources and system gaps**. What works well? What needs improvement?

Models

Here are some planning and system models from other states and cities. The first group lays out planning models. The second lists structural models for ongoing systems.

Initial Planning/Development Models

- New York and other states have used the **children's cabinet** structure. New York's is appointed by the Governor, with cross agency representation, and is linked to a Children's Cabinet Advisory Committee with broad representation.

- Washington State and others have developed **early learning councils** to study and make recommendations on systems development initiatives

- Vermont is one of the states that developed and initial **transitional board** to plan. This led to an executive order for a state entity

- A number of states have established **commissions**. Colorado's consists of state agencies and EC organizations

- In Minnesota, a group of **foundations** joined together to stimulate and "seed" early childhood systems building

Ongoing Administration and Development Models

- A number of states established a **new agency or department** – Georgia, Massachusetts (Department of Early Education and Care), Washington (cabinet level Department of Early Learning).

- Some evolved a **partnership between state departments** – Colorado, Oklahoma

- Oklahoma also established a **statewide foundation** to fundraise in the private sector

- Pennsylvania developed a **joint office** with a policy director reporting to both Education and Public Welfare and overseeing both education and human service early education initiatives

- Maryland chose a **division within an existing department**, State Education

- The **early learning councils**, mentioned above, also have an ongoing administrative role in some states

- In Washington state, there is also a **public-private nonprofit "catalyst"** to *plan* and to access foundation support – *Thrive by Five*

- North Carolina's Partnership for Children (Smart Start) oversees it's system through **a statewide non-profit with representative board of directors**. This is a public-private partnership that can implement, administer, and can access foundation support. It collaborates with their **Office of School Readiness**

- Iowa has developed a "**Community Empowerment Board**" to oversee system building

Leadership

Here are some of the sources of leadership for planning and system building.

- **Leadership is most effective when it comes from the executive,** the governor or mayor. Executive orders can be effective to begin, but ultimately legislation is required. Executive commitment energizes the planning process

- **Legislators** have sometimes taken the lead role and legislative initiatives are often required at one stage or another

- **Business champions** are important to planning efforts

- Leadership can also come from **foundations**
- Motivated **community leaders or organizations** have catalyzed action in some states and cities

Funding sources

Here some of the funding sources that states and/or cities have used for planning and system building.

- State General Fund
- CCDBG Quality $$s
- Foundation funding
- State and/or local public grants
- State appropriation from TANF
- Corporations

Supplementary Material for Think Tank

System Implementation Techniques and Strategies

This is a list are of some common techniques and strategies that other states and cities employ in their evolving systems. These are of interest for later system building, less so for the work of the Think Tank at this time.

- **Macro focus on policy, micro focus on implementation**. Generally, the broad focus and policy has been set at the state level, but evolving approaches to implementation are developed locally.

- **Administration and implementation requires funding and staffing**. Some-*body* or *organization* needs to be in charge of managing implementation.

- **Technical assistance** from state (or city) to local administrators.

- Use of **local non-profits for local administration**.

- **Allow flexibility or "waivers"** where specifics of regulations interfere with the goal of greater coherence, efficiency, and better outcomes for children. Allow local flexibility in implementation approaches.

- **No cookie-cutter implementation**. Diverse programs and approaches are required to meet diverse needs. Communities know their needs best.

- **Allow and encourage local innovation**. Minnesota developed a **"resource directory"** of locally developed good ideas to be shared across the state.

- Georgia used **focus groups of parents** as part of their planning process.

- **Relationship building** is important at all levels.

- The implementation **infrastructure needs to be funded**.

- Local planning entities should *not* **be providers**, rather planners and coordinators.

Lessons Learned

From the appendix in *Beyond Parallel Play* by the Build Initiative, these lay out "key points" from a survey of state and community leaders working on system building in Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Vermont.

- **Birth to five** is an appropriate focus for system building

- Reflect **race, class and cultural differences** in composition of planning and other structures

- Planning and governance structures require a **cross-section of early childhood stakeholders**

- **Communication, and networking platforms** are essential

- **Communication must be *required*** between state and community, and within same levels.

- There is value in **peer to peer networking** (community to community, agency to agency, among programs), but this has not been sufficiently funded.

- An **infrastructure assuring a best practice/research-based approach** is necessary for system building.

- **Community ownership** produces an advocacy base, foundation and other funding, and sustainability across administrations.

- **Communities are best equipped to determine their priorities**, but to do this requires **community learning,** which in turn requires support and funding.

- The state sets regulation and standards; the community implements. Or, "think globally, act locally."

- Reducing fragmentation is about more than consolidating funds and being flexible about rules; it is also about **"recontouring" and better coordinating existing services**.

- There need to be **formal mechanisms for reporting and accountability**.

- **Be aware of unintended consequences** including the reactions of conservatives or others to early childhood system building, and possible negative reactions from friends. In Pennsylvania, CCRRs initially fought a new system because they had had a roll in the previous system.

Other Questions to Consider

These are some additional questions raise by others or that came to mind as I thought about what we might do in New York City.

- *What is the correct balance between building a new system, and improving or better coordinating the existing system?*

- *How do we develop and infrastructure to support quality?*

- *Can we get help for our system building from outside? Financial assistance? Expertise? Marketing? Might we get it from the Build Initiative, Smart Start, National Governors Association, Foundations, others?*

- *Many of the state systems emphasize state/local collaboration. The state sets important policies and localities take responsibility for implementation, including bottom-up development. Is there a place for a "local" perspective in the city? Could, for instance, local CBOs play the role of the locality in system planning and perhaps, ultimately, implementation?*

- *Could the City's "communities" be boroughs? Or two per borough?*

- *What if the planning process were managed by a local non-profit?*

- *How much flexible funding is needed to support community planning?*

- *Where does QRIS fit into system building? In 2005, only 4 of 11 states included PreK in QRIS.*

- *Early childhood is still an industry in its relative childhood. Yet no field can "go to scale" without an appropriate infrastructure with common standards and rules. Banking, for instance shares common guidelines and infrastructure (ATMs, electronic transfers, etc). How do we continue to develop this infrastructure for our field?*

- *How can we work with marketing experts to develop a recognizable and "winning" name for the system we seek to develop?*

- *What about using voluntary social networks for public engagement/ awareness and building momentum?*