

Some Larger Issues for Community Resources Funding  
Found in Proposals to the ECCEC Committee  
August 18, 2010  
(Diane Adams, committee member)

The goal of the current funding process is to assure that the City of Madison meets the needs of children and families in our community, given constraints of City funding and program/agency capacity to deliver. The challenge is to determine how well a proposal or program (all from non-profit 501 c 3 agencies) can meet the goals established early in 2010. The proposals we received followed a format for writing within specific amounts of space and sharing proposed budgets, using the automated system provided. Having this standardized approach gave our committee the opportunity to better understand how a specific program or project fit within an agency and within City criteria for funding. It occurred to me that there are at least four larger issues that cut across the 34 proposals we reviewed that could potentially affect individual scoring and recommendations, so I wanted to share them with members of the Committee, for possible discussion.

1. School-age child care: Overall, the City has made remarkable efforts to assure that child care “out of school time” and in the summer is quality care. Particularly key has been to focus on systems for “drop in” care, where children in the program aren’t really there every day (otherwise it has been difficult to know what level of quality we were helping support). And the emphasis on the federal Child & Adult Care Food Program helps assure that good nutrition is a part of school-age care in Madison. Still, this set of proposals reveals some issues about the goal of high quality school-age care:

What is our overarching purpose for summer school-age care: to keep kids off the streets and entertained (field trips, etc.) or is it to help ease the “learning gap” during the summer, especially for minority children? (or some of each?) Are we missing an opportunity to encourage delving into foreign languages or math contests or reading challenges during the summer? Would that cost too much? Innovations like the bar codes may help track which children are coming, but may not assure that quality interactions occur. Perhaps a staff review of all City-accredited school-age programs and their summer or year-round programs would be helpful, since they weren’t in the proposals – to help us understand the current proposals better.

2. Head Start: The Dane County agency that is part of this country’s largest federal program for low-income children, DCPC, received extra federal dollars this year. Head Start encourages “partnerships” with full day care and school programs, but it is difficult to know which of the proposals for City funding should be called Head Start and which ones are partnerships with other existing agencies, such as a community center. Some of the proposals submitted by DCPC could possibly be “Early Head Start” but I couldn’t really determine if they were from the proposal. Could City staff share which proposals are part of the overall DCPC/Head Start program in Madison, and what our amount of dollars contributes to those programs?
3. Play and Learn: I was more confused after the presentation by the agencies involved than before, but that may just be my lack of understanding. One agency requested funding for two Play and Learns from the City, but some other organizations noted in the chart distributed at the presentation also receive some City funding – but maybe not for Play and Learn. One of the family services proposals mentions a Play and Learn for 345 children under age 2.

Do we understand that our limited resources designed to assure “high quality child care for low-income children” may be used to support play groups with a noble purpose, but not necessarily to serve low-income children? If so, then does the City need recognition as a

funder (similar to others) and as a partner? Further questions about Play and Learn: are the leaders trained in child development AND parent education? Are the complex partnerships offering many Play & Learn settings clear to the families? How long will the community support this effort? How will it be evaluated? How is it linked to high quality licensed child care programs in the community?

4. Parent Services: About 25 years ago, I edited and wrote chapters for a book titled “Parent Education and Public Policy,” so I have a special interest in how City dollars are being used to help support families, low-income parents, parents in transition, grandparents and other relatives, families in crisis, and so on. I have long believed that child care programs, especially full-day, full-year programs designed to assist working parents, are ideal places for parent support to occur, and many programs espouse this view. The problem often is that the teachers may not be trained in parent support as much as they are in child development; further, the length of day and availability to schedule parent education groups may be hindrances. However, while the long-standing relationships developed at child care programs with families may be less focused on parent support, in the end these could result in effective parenting strategies, simply by being stretched out over a several year period.

Madison has some terrific parent support groups and parent education efforts going that have kept parents hopeful and saved families from disaster for many years. Now could be the time to examine this new (to our committee) area of funding and see what it is we are being asked to fund. A drop-in child care center may have effective parenting classes, but what philosophy is being used? Do the parenting proposals use a common parenting curriculum? Do parent education staff have certification as Community Family Life Educators, or have they done special training in the curriculum used, and are they – or should they be – linked with referral services for special cases requiring social work or other therapeutic services? We are asked to help fund a 10-week program in one proposal and a 36-week program in another: which is better?

4. Community Recreation Services: This may be the occasion to discuss the City’s role in what has been, to this point, recreation programming for youth, and may relate to the larger issues surrounding school-age child care. Is the proposal for week-end programming a “stretch” for “Parent Education” funding?

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