



Denver City Council

Meeting Summary Joint Youth & Community Services & Finance Committees

Date: July 11, 2006

Time: 1:30

Location: Council Conference Room

Committee Members Present: Linkhart, Boigon, Brown, Faatz, Garcia, Johnson, Lehmann, Montero

Committee Members Absent: Wedgeworth, MacKenzie

Other Members Present: Rodriguez, Robb

1. Mayor's Early Childhood Initiative

Committee Action

The Committee voted—with Councilwoman Faatz voting no--- to refer a question to the voters to increase the sales tax by \$.0012 for early childhood education opportunities for all Denver children.

Summary of Discussion

Maria Lucero Guajardo, Mayor's Office of Education & Children, Linda Reilly, Co- Chair of Mayor's Leadership Team on Early Childhood Education, and Zack Neumeyer, Mayor's Leadership Team Member, explained the proposal to increase the sales tax with revenues earmarked for early childhood programs making the following points:

- Just over two years ago Mayor John Hickenlooper appointed the Mayor's Leadership Team (MLT) on Early Childhood Education--a group of business, education, and community leaders to study Denver's Early Childhood Education needs.
- After many months of researching programs across the nation the MLT concluded that making quality preschool available to all four-year olds is one of the best investments Denver can make in its future.
- Research demonstrates that young children who go to quality preschool do better both in school and later in life.
- Colorado teachers report that 1/3 of children come to Kindergarten unprepared to learn and once they fall behind in school they stay behind.
- Denver has just under 10,000 four year olds today – by 2010 there will be approximately 11,000.

- Currently the following preschool programs serve 1,880 four year olds: CCCAP, Head Start, CPP & other DPS funding.

According to Ms. Reilly the program goals are twofold: 1) Maximize access to and participation in quality preschool programs for all Denver four year olds; 2) Promote and support quality improvement of preschool programs.

Mr. Neumeier discussed the following components for the proposed programming:

1. Universal
2. Parental Choice
3. Participation open to all providers
4. Quality Programs
5. Oversight & Accountability
6. Efficient Administration

He said that parents will exercise choice through tuition credits determined by family need and program quality. Mr. Neumeier emphasized that program quality is crucial to effective child outcomes. He noted that this proposal uses market forces to drive program quality.

The governance model envisioned for the program is comprised of:

- **Board of Directors** to create and enforce the rules and regulations and manage the financial health of the District.
- **Board of Advisors** to advise the Board of Directors on policy issues regarding early childhood education.

Both boards will be appointed by the Mayor with City Council's approval and have staggered terms.

The proposed timeline for the program is:

- City Council holds hearings to refer measure to ballot July 2006
- Approval by the voters in November 2006
- January 1, 2007 – start collecting the sales tax revenue
- January 1, 2007 – start appointing the boards and hiring staff
- After staff is hired – start outreach and enrollment for August & begin quality evaluations
- January 1, 2008 – program up and running

Several councilmembers expressed concern about the volatile nature of the sales tax source and/or its regressive nature. Mr. Neumeier explained that the choice was based on polling data and focus groups identifying voter preferences. He noted that a first year reserve will be collected during the first year while the program is gearing up for implementation. This reserve will help the program in years when sales taxes are down.

Individual councilmembers made the following comments:

- The campaign should clearly spell out the percentage of funds that go directly to tuition support for children.
- It is important to measure outcomes rigorously in terms of the difference the program makes in academic achievement.
- It will not be easy to persuade voters to approve a tax increase.
- The City should not be expanding into this area, given the significant existing infrastructure needs that cannot now be met.
- Provider training costs should decline over time.
- The timing of the proposal is surprising, given the need for a bond measure to support infrastructure improvements.
- People and families should be a top priority for the City.
- This proposal is different from previous efforts because it is narrowly focused, entrepreneurial, and measurable.
- A great school system is a City's greatest economic asset.

Councilwoman Faatz voted no and all other Councilmembers present supported moving the early childhood education initiative out of Committee.

2. Briefing: Commission on Aging

Summary of Discussion

Lucia Guzman, Human Rights & Community Relations, discussed recent progress by the Commission. She indicated that vacancies have nearly been filled with the exceptions of positions in Council Districts 1, 6, and 9. More positions have been filled with individuals who are 60 and over in keeping with the law. Meeting participation has also improved. Other projects include: participation in a regional conference on aging, participation in the national conference, and co-sponsoring senior resource days. They are also planning a Summit on Aging to develop a work plan, modeled on the success of the Homeless Commission. All Human Rights and Community Relations (HRCR) staff are working on the event.

Currently HRCR is evaluating its structure, reviewing authorizing legislation, and assessing all of the Commissions. Hiring a director for the Commission on Aging has been delayed while this process is completed.

Shelley Smith, Committee Staff

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