Frequently Asked Questions about the MMF Recommendations for a Public-Private ECE Coordinating Entity

Why should we invest in this Entity when there is so much need right now/direct service demand?

Our current ECE system needs bold reform. The pandemic exposed the vulnerability of the existing child-care business model, which is built on an unsustainable financial foundation that has been further compromised by the recent economic devastation of COVID-19. If we don't invest in system-building now, we will find ourselves back where we started, which was already an untenable situation.

As we design our recovery, we have a historic opportunity to choose bold change. ECE should be an economic and social driver that launches us back to a thriving Montgomery County, soon and into the future.

Recovery does not mean rebuilding back to where we were. Recovery requires that we look to the future by investing in real and lasting systems change that resolves the inequities that currently exist. The need for change is not new, but the pandemic has put that need into stark relief.

This is a period where bold actions are less risky and generally produce outsized results.

How will having this entity make any difference in the life of a child in Montgomery County?

When assessing a program or organization, the universe is typically the children and families it serves. An assessment of the *system* differs in that it includes those not being served and requires an understanding of why they aren't participating.

An entity brings together stakeholders to identify/understand what barriers are keeping families from ECE services and programs and what policy changes, resources, and supports are needed to overcome them. It then works to ensure those are in place in the community.

An entity assesses quality and measures impact across the system and helps to ensure culturally relevant best practices are in place in all organizations and programs that impact the well-being, development, and education of young children. Without an entity, no individual organization or program ensures consistent quality across the system.

What do you mean by "system"?

The ECE system may include government funding, child care providers and programs, educators focused on young children, employers who offer child care benefits and other

components. The use of the word system implies that there is some degree of organization, direction, and integration/coordination of resources. The Early Care and Education system is actually a component of a larger Early Learning System, which consists of interconnected systems which also includes Family Support, Health and Nutrition, and Early Intervention systems. MMF has prioritized the early care part of the system in recent years through its ECE workforce advocacy as that part of the system has been hard hit by the COVID crisis and is ripe for policy advocacy.

How is this different from (or how does it intersect) with existing plans or entities? OR Isn't this just adding another layer to an already complicated landscape?

One of the entity's first tasks will be to cross-walk all existing public and private ECE and related efforts in alignment with its fiscal mapping to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive community plan. This involves a systematic crosswalk of the County's ECE Initiative, DHHS' ECE Plan, and Racial Equity and Social Justice legislation and plan, as well as private initiatives like MMF's ECE Workforce Coalition, and philanthropic priorities like those of Washington Area Women's Foundation, Greater Washington Community Foundation, and Healthcare Initiative Foundation.

A common plan helps all stakeholders, including public and private sector providers and philanthropy, ensure the effective and efficient use of their resources to address the community's most pressing needs.

One of the first tasks of an ECE Coordinating Entity will be to re-examine all of the many county commissions and advisory groups in the ECE space and propose better alignment of them all and, potentially, unification of some of them. In pursuing any of these recommendations, the county may need to modify the existing laws that established these groups.

How is this any different from what the County Executive proposed regarding the reconfiguration of the ECCC?

In all of our recommendations, the entity has an independent governing board with legal responsibility for governing the entity and a board that includes both private and public sector representatives with decision-making authority. Not true of the CE's proposal.

While many of these diverse, cross-sector voices currently have a strong advisory role in existing ECE structures, bold reform necessitates true governing authority representing all stakeholders.

First and foremost, the ECCB proposal envisioned a public-private steering committee serving as a government advisory group/sounding board with private representation. The ECCB would

not be an independent legal entity, which does not allow the neutrality necessary for effective ECE systembuilding.

Second, the proposal also does not explain how financing would work and does not speak to the structure for seeking and receiving private-sector dollars.

Third, while the suggested reorganization in the ECCB option does focus on the social justice aspects of ECE access, it does not incorporate an economic lens, which would include a stronger employer decision-making role. This is a critical gap in the proposal because ECE is an economic imperative.

Furthermore, the viewpoint of the proposed ECCB structure is government-centric, which means it encompasses only a portion of the dollars presently dedicated to ECE in the County. While the public sector leadership in and commitment to ECE is extraordinary compared to other jurisdictions, this perspective is too narrow in that it does not provide an independent, comprehensive 360° view of all aspects of Montgomery County's ECE system.

Fourth, there was no real input into the proposed reorganization of the ECCC by the wider community. This reorganization/restructuring of the ECCB proposal is laudable, but does not change the need for an independent, public-private ECE Coordinating Entity to affect real systems change.

But why can't we just elevate the ECCC to be the entity?

Main point:
As stated in the report, because the ECCC does not meet the community endorsed criteria for a public private coordinating entity. It is not neutral or independent, as it lives in government, and the members of the private sector have a voice, but not a vote, which renders it an advisory committee rather than a true governance body.

Subpoints:
  ● ECCC would have to contract with a nonprofit organization to receive private dollars which limits the flexibility and innovation needed with new funding that the county needs.
  ● Being in government doesn't provide the 360 view necessary for two cross-sector system building.

Is this an abdication of responsibility by the public sector for a public problem if we do this?

The entity's fiduciary responsibility is to align, strengthen, and coordinate the ECE people, data, and money in Montgomery County. **_An important caveat is that this core function does not mean that the entity controls or has authority over all ECE people, data, and money. For_**

example, it does not have, and never will have authority over all existing DHHS or MCPS funding streams.

However, the entity's 360° view and iterative system mapping will allow it a key advisory role with regard to the money it does not control. Furthermore, the entity will have the ability to bring private dollars and innovations to current county initiatives that will enhance the system overall. In doing so, the entity will intentionally seek and receive system-building funding, but it would not endeavor to provide direct services or divert direct-service funding away from those providing it.

The county should provide for flexibility as the entity launches and evolves. To do so, MMF recommends frequent reporting during the first two years (e.g., every four to six months) with explicit feedback on how the entity is meeting benchmarks and what may need to change. After that, MMF recommends ongoing formal, regular reporting from the entity to the public and private sector stakeholders. A combination of flexibility and accountability of an ECE Coordinating Entity, in whatever form it takes, is essential to its success

You mention equity in the report, what do you mean by that?

One of the early, high priority tasks of the entity will be to define what it means by equity and establish standards and a system for measuring accountability as a priority during the launch phase. The Equity Task Force could lay the foundation for this framework and ensure that it aligns with the county's Racial Equity and Social Justice legislation and the DHHS assessment tool that stems from it.

What does this mean in practice?

The entity should consider options including having a specific number of slots for each stakeholder group; having rotating terms to allow for different voices to be at the table; ensuring that there is voting power and authority among all stakeholder groups; providing advocacy training for advisory group and board members.

The Community Action Board is an example of what diverse representation and real leadership by the community looks like.

A good model for parent participation is the Head Start Parent Council, which has developed a system for getting input and participation from parents, including providing stipends and advocacy trainings.

Of all of the criteria for an entity you delineate, which one (or two) are truly the most essential?

In keeping with our community engagement and best practices research research: independence and neutrality are key to an entity's success. Best achieved through a public-private stand-alone, legal governing entity (one of key criteria for all the recommended models).

Does MMF have a preference for one of these three recommendations?

No. Individual leadership group members may have preferences, but as a body we agree that these three recommendations all meet the established criteria and could be successful if adequately supported by the County Council and MMF acts as a transition agent to ensure continued community engagement and adherence to the principles of collective impact.

The governance structure is confusing:

Why do we need two co-chairs?

Our vision is to ultimately have one chair of the governing board, but for the first few years, as the entity builds trust and creates its first community plan, it may make sense to have two co-chairs (one public and one private) to ensure buy-in and trust in the process.

Why is the board so big/too big?
Yes, this is a concern that we are well aware of and we don't have a solution at this point. Our hope is that as the entity evolves and some of the many advisory groups and coalitions in the county are streamlined and united, there will be an opportunity to make the board more lean. But, at this point, these are the voices we recommend be heard and these are the representatives who need legal voting authority as part of a true public-private coordination.

Do you have to be a member of one of the existing entities or groups listed on the ground level tier of the governance chart to have a voice?

No. The ground level tier on the governance chart contains all of the existing advisory groups in the County. These can seed some of the Community Advisory Groups that feed the governing board. But the Entity should seek diverse people and perspectives throughout the County to serve on the Community Advisory Groups in addition to the ones that already exist in the public and private sectors. MMF provides the ground level tier as an illustrative example of who/what the entity should build from, but this is not, by any means, an exhaustive list of those who can feed into the governing board.

Who appoints/approves board members?

Under all of these models, the County Executive would appoint, and the County Council would confirm, all members of the governing board.

How long is their term?

Two to three years, staggered (rotating for private sector seats)

What do you want the County Council to do:

1. Endorse the entity criteria, page 32
2. Select a model, pages 33-42
3. Adopt legislation necessary to establish the entity, pages 46-48
4. Make timely council and executive branch staff appointments to the governing board of the entity, pages 41 and 48
5. Provide start up operational funds, page 53
6. Indicate a commitment to receive and view favorably the coordinating entity's recommendations.

For any of the models, MMF envisions that the County Executive would appoint the board and the County Council would confirm its members. Given this process, the County Council will most likely have to pass legislation establishing a governing board and the County Code will also likely need to be modified to indicate the parameters of the board, as well as the nominating and appointment process

How is this different from the WorkSource Montgomery experience?

Lessons learned:

- Entity must not move to program delivery and to ensure that the entity has, in its mandate, a system perspective and a prohibition on direct service provision.
- Visionary leadership is key
- Continued community engagement across the entire universe of the system is vital
- Agreement on accountability measures at the outset is necessary
- MMF must play a role in transitioning the entity to independence

What if this isn't the time to do something new and we choose not to act?

We can expect service and program gaps to increase, inequities to be exacerbated, public and private ECE champions to work in silos, and Montgomery County to lag behind in all the things we say we prioritize: economic development, human development, racial equity and social justice, and innovation.