

THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT STAFF COUNCIL

Special Meeting

Wednesday, March 10, 2021

MS Teams

Please note that the below notes are not verbatim; see the video recording for the authoritative version of this material.

Members in Attendance: President Caleb Gilbert, Vice President Laura Clayton, Barbara Asimwe, Cheryl Herrick, Mindy Kear, Allison Spain, Emily Taylor, Kenneth Viglucci, Jennie Keenan, Christa Hagan-Howe, Holly Pedrini, Jay LaShombe, Stephanie Glock, Michael O’Sullivan, Bridget Tully, Kristen Cella, Heather Allard, Tatiana Andrievskaya, Carri-Ann Rock, Jenna Emerson, Joe Speidel, Jilliene Rodriguez, Katherine McGinn Hall

Staff: Elisabeth Blair, Staff Council Program Support

Ex-officio: Alan Shashok, Staff Council Administrator

Guest: Rocki-Lee DeWitt, Professor of Management in the Grossman School of Business

Call to Order:

Caleb Gilbert called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

Presentation: Rocki-Lee DeWitt

Rocki-Lee DeWitt presented on updates about Provost Prelock’s childcare working group. In Summer 2020, Provost Prelock put together a Work Group, co-chaired by Jes Kraus and Rocki-Lee DeWitt. Their charge was to explore alternative childcare options for the campus community, and to put together a review of needs, and compile data and identify options that are fair, fiscally sound and community-collaborative and consistent with “Our Common Ground”. The work group includes multiple staff representatives. They have met regularly to understand the situation, including meetings with a variety of experts, data gathering, and attendance at community and state-level meetings. The following underlying issues have been identified: safety, availability, affordability, and equity. They have brainstormed options and are evaluating them against UVM’s ability to address these issues. The Provost receives regular updates on their ongoing work; a final report has yet to be submitted.

Issues specific to each concerned party:

Parents: Availability, Affordability

Providers: Rules and regulations; low pay associated with being a childcare professional

UVM: Funding challenges; large employer, so a large variation in needs and expectations

There is an ongoing awareness of what other universities and employers are doing, and the need to benchmark from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. Ultimately, the group is seeking out what UVM can do that is “best” in the context of its resources. Also of note is the Let’s Grow Kids

organization, which has been at the forefront of closing the gap in quality childcare, and is an outgrowth of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Legislation may pass at some point on paid family leave and payroll tax.

Three Categories of Ideas:

- 1) Employee Support - updated list of resources; flex time and flex work;
- 2) Support of Child Care Center Operators
 - a) YMCA/CESS Partnership – this has already happened
- 3) Input to Emerging Public Policy

The various levels of support, in terms of resource intensity, were detailed in the presentation. One extreme includes engagement with other employers, flexible working time, and referral and information services. The other extreme includes on- or near-site company childcare facilities.

The pandemic makes it difficult to understand what the steady state needs might be.

Q&A:

Q: Has a university-wide survey of where staff/faculty are with their child care needs been administered yet, to help us gauge what the needs are and to hear directly from parents and employees?

A: No, we have not yet done so, but we have drafted a survey. We will be using a much briefer draft to get clarity on where we are. We don't want to put anything in the survey as possible options if the University isn't able to offer those options.

Q: When do you expect to have a report? Also, are you looking at all/any parenting/childcare needs, or just early childhood education?

A: We started with a narrow view of infant and toddler care (which have the biggest gaps in available services); the expenses associated with these age ranges are about twice those associated with the next age group. Then they began to expand to consider the unique needs associated with each age group. However, they are still primarily focused on age 0-5. They are hoping also that flexibility will be one of the primary drivers of future policies, in order to meet the changing and unique needs of different parents.

As for the date of the report, they do not have a set date, and are interested in the data they'll gather after the pandemic calms down.

Q: Is this group considering partnering in such a way that there would be specific slots for UVM staff?

A: This is an option being considered. It's important to note that each of those types of arrangements would require negotiations and contracts, so how to pick winners and losers?

Q: Are there any plans or ideas for this coming summer, regarding daycare or adventure camp (through Campus Rec) or other helpful childcare methods?

A: They are thinking about this but have no specific plans to offer yet.

A discussion took place here around broader issues like flexible work hours so parents can pick up and drop off their kids on time for work, not getting charged for overtime, etc.

Presenter DeWitt asked all attendees: "What has been the most difficult part of COVID-19 Pandemic

when it comes to childcare?”

Responses in the chat included (the following are direct quotes, copy-pasted from the chat):

- Building new patterns/care/arrangements which might need to abruptly change once COVID passes
- Having to change childcare centers and not being able to see the new school or meet new teachers in-person...also keeping children out of school if they have any cold symptoms
- losing CCS honestly...given the high quality and that we lost a community in the time we needed it most. The quality of early childcare education lost by CCS closing and the fact that our current childcare situation is pieced together now, without consistency for my child.
- Having my kids thinking I'm ignoring them all day while I try to work
- The mental health impacts of the isolation for teenagers are something we feel keenly in my family.
- Having to lock myself in a room while working from home if I want to minimize the interruptions from children.
- Navigating daycare closures, stricter rules about when kids need to be kept home, and working from home with two toddlers without having any backup care
- not meeting my child's developmental needs
- Community of other families and parents was a huge loss during COVID especially coming from CCS
- My eldest son has special needs and he did not have in person access to services for months
- Also, trying not to backseat parent
- Not being able to get support at all. (no outside household gatherings) Every runny nose means both kids need to be out of daycare until a negative Covid test is obtained and the runny nose is manageable. For a one year old who cannot wipe or blow his nose that means he could be out of daycare for a week or more before it is manageable, yet we need to work.
- For our family (2 staff members as many others know/also experience), it has been the abrupt closure of CCS, then finding a new child care option for our toddler (and now an infant as well) without ever stepping in the school as well as the increased cost for both of them through this
- The unknown - could I get a call tomorrow that my daughter is a close contact and is being sent home; could the school close; what will I do when I am told to go back to in-person work when we have restructured our whole arrangement and now need to be home for after school care ... will we be able to get a slot again for after school care we can afford? And the spread of focus between kiddo and work when she is home... not being able to fully focus on either.
- Sleeping less because I wake up earlier than usual to catch up with work and avoid less disruptions when the kids wake up
- The lack of opportunity to socialize children, even outside of a school/care situation
- Losing CCS families/teachers (and of course experiences). It was/is an unbelievable grieving process and a loss to all of us. My 3 year old still doesn't understand it some days and is afraid her new daycare will close (found 7 months later) and she will lose all those friends at any point as well.
- Not knowing any of the new teachers or families at the new daycare.
- my son (3yo) still asks when CCS is reopening and when I explain that the school is no longer school he gets frustrated and thinks that it will happen when the virus is gone

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 PM.