

To: Spark NH Council
From: Spark NH Executive Committee
RE: Spark NH Structure
Date: 5/9/18

Background:

Spark NH was created by Executive Order of Governor Lynch in 2011. The Council is currently a mix of positions required by the Head Start for School Readiness Act, early childhood program substantive experts and key early childhood stakeholder representatives across health, early learning and family support, and private and public organizations.

Spark NH's original Executive Order named 20 members. That number was expanded in our second Executive Order in 2012 to add 3 more members to meet requirements of our Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health) grant. Finally, in 2016 Governor Hassan's office passed a 3rd Executive Order to eliminate some positions that no longer existed (i.e., Kids Count was defunct at the time; NH did not get an ECCS grant so there was no longer an ECCS position) and to add the Pediatric Society and the Bureau of Children's Behavioral Health. (Executive Orders are attached).

In its first 7 years, the Council has made great progress on public awareness of the importance of early childhood. This has started to shift understanding and priorities in the state. Our committees have made great plans to better coordinate early childhood data, to better early childhood professional development, to better cross-sector collaboration, and to promote policy priorities to ensure children and their families are healthy, learning and thriving. None of these plans has been fully implemented yet because we have not had the authority to do so, nor been able to engage government and other powerful stakeholders at the highest levels to make such change.

Spark NH is now at a stage of development where we are ready to consider whether we want to work differently going forward and, if so, what configuration would make us more successful.

For your consideration:

The governor has presented an opportunity to think about how to configure Spark NH to best meet our mission: *Provide leadership that promotes a comprehensive, coordinated, sustainable early childhood system that achieves positive outcomes for young children and families, investing in a solid future for the Granite State.* And vision: *All children in New Hampshire are healthy, learning and thriving, now and in the future.*

At the last Spark NH Council meeting, the Executive Committee made a recommendation that the Spark NH Executive Order be changed to allow for Spark NH to include and engage people with more authority to further our mission. The Council's discussion at the April meeting revealed that the recommendation was premature because Council members had not had enough time to reflect on whether any change was warranted and why before discussing the merits of any proposal for change. As a result, our entire June meeting will be devoted to this issue. We will begin with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Spark NH's current configuration and whether any change is desired and if so, what kind. In coming to its recommendation, the Executive Committee considered several options, which are listed below. You may think of other ones that we should consider as well. In preparation for our next meeting, please think

about these options and come prepared to discuss them. Please call Laura at 226-7900 if you have any questions.

Options:

1. Do nothing – keep the Executive Order as is.
2. Do nothing to Council membership; change Executive Order to give Spark NH more opportunity to report to the groups we'd like to influence.
(e.g., Annual report to the legislature on the "state of early childhood," annual report to commissioners of government departments).
3. Change membership of Council to include more members with authority over budgets and policy to enable greater change in the early childhood system to meet our mission (commissioners, business leaders, other leaders across health, early learning and family support). We were informed we could not make the current Council larger.
4. Do nothing to current Council membership, but change Executive Order to appoint a super Council/ Executive Cabinet that has a membership with more authority over budgets and policy. The group would be linked to the Council, but would meet much less frequently.
5. Other ideas. If applicable, please share your ideas with Laura in advance of the June meeting.

Questions Raised at April Council Meeting and Responses:

1. *Is the governor recommending a change?* Governor Sununu offered us this possibility only if we think it's best to help us meet our mission.
2. *How do changes in Spark NH configuration relate to the Early Childhood Governance work?*
The Early Childhood Governance work is focused on the structure of state government: what structural changes in government might enable the early childhood system to better serve young children and their families. Regardless of whether and how changes are made in government, the state will still need an early childhood advisory council. While Spark NH will always work with, and is affected by, government, our role is also to link government with the early childhood field across health, early learning and family support.