

Draft Minutes: Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council
January 22, 2021
Via Zoom - 9:00 AM

Council Members Present: Carol Bowen, Amy Bunnell, Tracy Burns, Gwen Easter, Allison Freeny, Bernie Hascall, Melody Hobson, Amber Jara, Stephanie Knust, Krynn Larsen, Karla Lester, Joan Luebbers, Mary Phillips, Paula Thompson, Nicole Vint, Allison Wilson

Council Members Absent: Susan Borchert, Cathy Mohnike, Heather Pohl, Brittni Waters

Individuals also in Attendance: Council Facilitator, Eleanor Shirley; Council Staff, Karen Hoffman; Technical Assistants, Amanda Adams, Lynne Brehm, Adam Feser, Pat Frost, Cole Johnson, Stephanni Renn, Connie Shockley, Kim Texel; guest presenters, Hallie Duke, Susan Sarver, Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal

The **meeting was convened** at 9:02 a.m. by Chairperson, Mary Phillips, who gave welcome and invited those in attendance to introduce themselves.

Approval of minutes – February 21, 2020

Motion made and seconded by Lester and Bowen to approve the minutes from the February 21, 2020 meeting; roll-call vote was taken and the motion passed.

Roll call vote: 13-yes, 2-abstain, 0-no.

Yes: Bowen, Bunnell, Burns, Easter, Hascall, Hobson, Knust, Larsen, Lester, Luebbers, Phillips, Thompson, Vint, Wilson

Abstain: Freeny, Jara

Today's Agenda

Eleanor led a review of the day's agenda.

Public Comment, Announcements, Upcoming Events

Mary Phillips asked for public comments or upcoming events; none were given.

Catching Up

Eleanor Shirley shared a power point with some insights and a review of 2020. Because in-person meetings for May, August, and November did not occur, updates were provided to the Council and are on the website. Review also included that CARES Act funds were made available to help support child care providers in continuing business and that care of young children, services coordination, and special education for infants and toddlers were adapted. The Governor's Biennial Report remains a priority and will be addressed when ECICC can meet in person for more discussion. Eleanor was able to conduct a virtual orientation for new members, Amber Jara and Heather Pohl. She announced the Governor has extended the Open Meetings Executive Order through April 30, 2020, so there will likely be another virtual ECICC meeting in April, rather than the one scheduled for May 7.

CCDF Update (Federal Child Care Development Fund)

Nicole Vint, administering CCDF block grant for Nebraska, shared a great deal of information, which is captured in its entirety below:

Title 392 Child Care Subsidy Regulations implemented September 15, 2015

Many of these changes were implemented through process changes, legislation, and/or the child care subsidy provider agreement prior to 9/15/20. For those already implemented they are now in regulations.

These regulation changes align with the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reauthorization. These changes also strengthen the continuity of care children receive from providers by reducing disruptions to subsidy authorizations during the 12-month eligibility period.

Families and children

- Homelessness is a need for service; as informed by the U.S. McKinney-Vento Act
- Sliding fee (family contribution) will not increase during a 12 month authorization period; only decrease
- Defined temporary change; allowing family child care during change so long as it is under 3 months (i.e. parent leave, sick leave, holiday break, pause in work, etc.)
- Children turning 13 years of age during their authorization period can continue to use child care until their authorization ends
- Transitional Child Care added (previously passed in state legislation)
- Job search is 3 months; initial job search was removed
- Child support sanctions will only be imposed at initial application or redetermination; no longer imposed during a 12 month authorization period
- Twelve month eligibility periods; case will only close if the family moves out of state, fraud is identified, income is over 85% State Median Income, or the 3 months of job search has ended and employment is not secured

Providers

- All providers signing a Subsidy Enrollment agreement must be 19 years of age
- Providers must meet the following training or other requirements prior to approval: background checks, Prepare to Care, and Pediatric First Aid and CPR (Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation)
- All subsidy providers can bill up to 5 absent days per child per month
- Defined emergency preparedness and planning; workbook developed for license-exempt providers
- Defined the 11 federally required health and safety standards
- Licensed-exempt providers must complete 4 hours of annual training, 2 of which must be health and safety specific

Market Rate Survey

- Contracted with Buffett Early Childhood Institute, Greg Welch leading the effort.
- Data collected over a 3- month period, ending on November 30, 2020. Data collection included 3 phases:
 - Phase I: Survey sent to all licensed child care providers.
 - Phase II: Reminder post card sent to providers.
 - Phase III: Providers who did not respond to Phase I or II received a phone call and/or email reminder to complete the survey.
- State statute requires DHHS to conduct a Market Rate Survey every 2 years and adjust rates every odd numbered year.
 - New rates will go into effect July 1, 2021

CCDF State Plan (Federal Child Care Development Fund)

- New Plan period October 1, 2021 – September 30, 2024
- Steps include:
 - Drafting plan with collaboration of other agencies and stakeholders
 - Blank plan/template and contact information will be located on DHHS Child Care Subsidy website
 - Draft plan available for public hearing and public comment (April-May)
 - Plan submitted by July 1, 2021

Fingerprints (as part of background checks)

- LB 1185 signed by Governor in August 2020
- Requires fingerprints for all license-exempt subsidy providers and household members
- Implementation starts February 2021 through September 2021

COVID-19 CARES Relief Package I

- The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act appropriated an additional \$3.5 billion in supplemental CCDF discretionary funds.
 - This funding gave lead agencies additional resources to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19 and expands flexibility in providing child care assistance to children and families.
- Nebraska received \$20,077,074
 - Child Care Relief Funds for Private/Public Contribution
 - Child Care Stabilization Funds
 - Over 1,600 providers applied and \$5.6M
 - Incentive to Reopen Funds
 - Nebraska Child Care Referral Network Website
 - Afterschool and Summer Care for School Aged Children
 - Policy/Process changes:
 - Absence Days
 - Full Time School Age care from Mar-May
 - In-Home Provider
 - Remote learning
- DHHS CARES \$1,200 checks to Subsidy providers in Dec. 2020 = over \$2M

COVID-19 Relief Package II

- On December 27, 2020, President Trump signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, which included \$10 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).
 - Nebraska has not yet received an official Notice of Award, however, it is estimated that Nebraska will receive approximately \$57.1 Million through the CCDBG.
 - Planning is under way

Member Gwen Easter requested access to clearer information regarding additional funding opportunities in light of the pandemic to be able to share with other providers in her area.

PDG (Federally-Funded Preschool Development Grant) Strategic Plan Update

Susan Sarver, Director of Workforce Planning and Development at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, introduced herself and Institute Consultant, Hallie Duke. Hallie presented on behalf of Susan, sharing a power point entitled, "Nebraska Early Childhood Strategic Plan: A Dynamic Plan by and for Nebraskans." The Strategic Plan was previously shared with the Council for its consideration and approval prior to being submitted to the Federal Government. Hallie noted that the plan was pre-pandemic, and that revisions are being made as needed moving forward. She emphasized the importance of children developing in the context of high-quality care environments, saying it benefits the child, the family, and contributes to the economy and stability of our communities when children are in quality care and developing well, and families have confidence in that. The plan is about having a coordinated approach to creating this for all children in Nebraska. Moving forward, Hallie said they are looking through the "pandemic lens" a little bit, to glean what's been learned, and that efforts will continue to engage Nebraska families from across the state to further develop the strategies and action plans to determine measurable data. Hallie shared the Strategic Plan's vision statement: "To provide all Nebraska children and their families with access to quality early childhood services that support children's healthy development from birth through age 8." The strategic plan came

together following five months of meetings and input from stakeholder input, and lays out four interrelated goals (Access, Quality, Collaboration, Alignment), each with its own objectives, strategies and actions. Going forward in 2021-2022, the plan is to continue to engage Nebraskans in the conversation to further develop this plan, focus on strategies and actions plans to achieve the goals, and identify measurable indicators. They will be reaching out to the families and communities not included in the prior five-month process.

Regarding ECICC engagement, they will continue to bring updates on stakeholder input, as well as asking the Council to reach communities whose voices have not yet been heard. When PDG funding runs out, the goal is for there to be a robust network that has been created, and a solid network of people striving to advance this work as a result. Finally, Hallie shared the Strategic Plan website – NEarlychildhoodplan.org – where viewers can read the plan, including a concise summary. The Council was asked to sign up for meetings to become more engaged.

PDG Renewal Grant Update

Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal, with Nebraska Children and Families, who manages the PDG, had shared two pdfs with the Council prior to the meeting. She also shared a power point, “Preschool Development Renewal Grant – Building Quality Early Childhood Care and Educational Services for Nebraska’s Families” as an update and refresher for the Council. A slide showed what federal department the grant originated from, and the recipients within Nebraska.

The Preschool Development Grant come from the U.S. Dept. Of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), awarded to the Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) as the grantee, with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF) and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) being sub-contractors. NCF has the responsibility to provide management for the PDG and its projects, and reports directly to DHHS. A graphic showed that NCF has subcontracted with other organizations for various PDG-funded projects. Shannon shared the overall vision and Nebraska’s goals of the PDG project, and a look-back at a timeline beginning in 2018 when the initial grants were awarded. As part of the required Needs Assessment, a survey sent to families with young children, and providers in Nebraska, revealed a number of challenges for both families and care providers. The PDG renewal grant is building on Nebraska’s current strengths to help build access and availability of quality child care and education. Twenty-four projects will address gaps that have been identified from the Needs Assessment, depicted and organized by color graphic that indicated six areas of focus, as well as the leadership involved. Next steps include completing a 4th quarterly report, a continuation application, and a budget. A Project Performance Report is due May 29th, 2021. Shannon would like to provide progress updates at future ECICC meetings. She encouraged the group to sign up for the PDG newsletter communications by going to NEPDG.org. Shannon is also available to answer questions by emailing her at Sboekstal@nebraskachildren.org.

Part C APR (Annual Performance Report) Update

Amy Bunnell began by noting the retirement on December 30th of longtime ECICC member and DHHS employee, Julie Docter, sharing the DHHS is in the process of getting the position posted. Amy shared a power point and updates about the IDEA (U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) Part C FFY (Federal Fiscal Year) 2019 Annual Performance Report (APR), which is required to be submitted February 1st of each year to the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The report contains the required information and data that is required for the reporting period of July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020. She reminded the group that the report was previously shared with the Council in the November update email, and that the Council Chair provides certification of the Council’s review of Nebraska’s APR, and assurance that the final report will be provided to Nebraska’s Governor. A copy of the final version will be posted on the EDN (Early Development Network) website and a link emailed to the Council.

Next Amy shared that, with the APR being completed, the Annual IDEA Part C Application for federal funding is also getting started. This also occurs through the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, and annually provides funding to each state in order to serve infants and toddlers with disabilities, and costs related to that infrastructure. There are federal regulations regarding the functions of the Council in respect to this application. Specifically, the Council is to advise and assist the Lead Agency for early intervention. In Nebraska there are two

Lead Agencies: the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education, Office of Special Education. The application is due 5/7/21 and, once approved, Nebraska will receive approximately \$3 million dollars on July 1, 2021, to implement state early intervention programs. Any shared information about how these funds are used in Nebraska. Once the application is complete, it must be made available for public comment for 30 days.

Head Start Update

Joan Luebbers, Head Start Collaboration Director, shared a power point that gave background of both Federal Head Start Program and Early Head Start programs, including numbers served in Nebraska and dollars provided for services in 2020. Like so many programs, adjustments have been made to address Covid concerns. A Covid-19 Relief Package of \$250 million dollars has been approved by the federal Government, however, it is not yet known how money will be distributed. Through CARES Act funding, Congress has also provided over \$1 billion dollars to support Head Start programs to continue operating in a safe way. Of interest, Joan noted that two new United States Senators are Head Start alumni. A listing of Nebraska Head Start Directors may be found at this link: <https://www.education.ne.gov/oec/nebraska-head-start-directors/>, and the state contacts for Head Start are Joan Luebbers, joan.luebbers@nebraska.gov, and Steph Knust, sknust@dtheadstart.com.

Council Vacancies and Recruitment

Eleanor discussed the current vacancies on the Council and recruitment efforts, and the process that people use to apply to the Council through the Governor's website. She especially noted that applicants need to designate what role they wish to serve on for the ECICC, since the application is not able to be specific. The group was also encouraged to think about continuity of the Council as it relates to members who cycle off following a term and making sure there is someone who could possibly step into that role. She also emphasized the importance of sharing about the ECICC and the many efforts in Nebraska for early child care.

May Meeting Components

Eleanor shared that, since the Governor's Executive Order to allow for virtual public meetings has been extended through April, the May meeting will very likely be moved to a date in April instead. Members were asked to pencil in Friday, April 9th, which will be confirmed in the future. Possible meeting components were shared and will be confirmed by the Steering Committee when creating the next meeting's agenda. The group was invited to send additional suggestions to Eleanor or Karen.

Other/Adjourn

Mary Phillips asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. It was moved and seconded by Hascal and Lester respectively, and the meeting adjourned at 11:28am.

Next Meeting: April 9, 2021, will be virtual. Zoom meeting link to come.

Future 2021 ECICC meeting dates

- April 9 via zoom
- August 20
- November 19