

Draft Minutes: Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council

April 9, 2021

Via Zoom - 9:00 AM

Council Members Present: Jessica Anthony, Susan Borchert, Carol Bowen, Amy Bunnell, Tracy Burns, Gwen Easter, Allison Freeny, Bernie Hascall, Melody Hobson, Amber Jara, Krynne Larsen, Karla Lester, Joan Luebbers, Cathy Mohnike, Mary Phillips, Heather Pohl, Paula Thompson, Nicole Vint, Allison Wilson

Individuals also in Attendance: Council Facilitator, Eleanor Shirley; Council Staff, Karen Hoffman; Technical Assistants, Amanda Adams, Jennifer Auman, Lauri Cimino, Adam Feser, Pat Frost, Cole Johnson, Stephanni Renn, Connie Shockley, Kim Texel, Staci Zuerlein; guest presenters Kristine Luebbe, Betty Medinger, Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal, Nikki Roseberry-Keiser, Greg Welch, Rosie Zweibach

The meeting was convened at 9:05 a.m. with Facilitator, Eleanor Shirley, greeting the group and drawing attention to the agenda that was sent out prior. The Public Meeting notice was also mentioned and can be found on the Governor's website. Council Secretary, Karen Hoffman, conducted a roll call for attendance; Council Chair, Mary Phillips asked for any visitors to identify themselves.

***Approval of minutes – January 22, 2021**

Motion made and seconded by Lester and Thompson to approve the minutes from the January 22, 2021 meeting; roll-call vote was taken, and the motion passed.

Roll call vote: 14-yes, 4-abstain, 0-no

Yes: Bowen, Bunnell, Burns, Freeny, Hascall, Hobson, Jara, Larsen, Lester, Luebbers, Phillips, Thompson, Vint, Wilson

Abstain: Anthony, Borchert, Mohnike, Pohl

Today's Agenda

Due to COVID 19 concerns, the Steering Committee made the decision to meet virtually through ZOOM and to also shorten the timeframe of the meeting. The agenda for the shortened meeting had been sent out prior and the group was encouraged to follow along.

****Public Comment, Announcements, Upcoming Events**

Paula Thompson mentioned an upcoming University of Nebraska-Kearney Early Childhood conference on October 22 & 23, sharing that Save the Date communication will be going out soon. Cathy Mohnike shared about her coming retirement the end of June, and that there will be a new Homeless Education Liaison on the Council. Another retirement was shared by Mary Phillips, also the end of June. Council Vice-chair, Karla Lester, will step in as Chair beginning in July. Mary shared some thoughts about having been on the Council for two terms, saying it has been a labor of love.

Nebraska Child Care Resource and Referral

Nikki Roseberry-Keiser, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF), introduced herself, sharing that she is the manager for the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network (CCRN).

She talked about the effects of Covid on families utilizing child care in Nebraska, and that the web-based network was built in response to the needs of these families and their children. Nikki took the group through a power point to demonstrate its general features including the process of seeking out child care. Each provider has a page of their own to enter relevant information for families to access. This information comes from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) licensing database and is uploaded daily to the site, with changes occurring

every 24 hours. The site is also used for communicating with providers regarding changes in regulations, grant opportunities, etc.

Nikki shared some of the Google Analytics user numbers for the site, saying they have been averaging between 600 & 700 users per month over the past few months. The website, which is also available in Spanish, is constantly being refined. For providers without access to technology, a Helpdesk can be reached by phone to assist with making changes. Nikki can be reached at nroseberry@nebraskachildren.org.

Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Update

As Mary introduced Betty Medinger from Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, she mentioned that Betty is retiring soon, and thanked her for her many years of service to children in Nebraska.

Betty referenced a timeline that had previously been shared with the Council regarding a number of efforts and historical events that have guided the improvement of early childhood programs and services including quality child care in Nebraska. She took the group through some of the main highlights before moving to a power point and the Preschool Development Grant timeline as well as the partners involved. Council members, Melody Hobson and Nicole Vint, were both recognized for their tireless work on both the initial and follow-up PDG grants. The Council receives frequent PDG updates, and Betty reminded the group about the Needs Assessment that was done from the 2019 planning grant which identified strengths and gaps in Nebraska, and the resulting strategic plan. The Buffett Early Child Institute led this work which Betty said was a “heavy lift.” The follow-up grant was awarded in 2020 and is for the implementation of 24 projects that cover six targeted areas. These were all shared on the power point. For more information about the PDG, including signing up for the eNewsletter, visit www.NebraskaPDG.org. Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal can be reached at sboekstal@nebraskachildren.org.

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program Update

Nicole Vint shared a power point with updates since the January ECICC meeting. These updates included the March announcement that DHHS will pay the full cost of fingerprints for both new and existing child care providers and others through September 30, 2021. They were also granted a federal waiver that allows staff to start supervised employment while FBI fingerprints and criminal history checks are pending. DHHS is running a state background check, themselves; the waiver ends on September 30, 2021.

Nicole also shared that the State Plan for 2022-2024 is underway, saying they are currently working with their stakeholders and partners who contribute to the CCDF activities. Ultimately this plan is their application for CCDF funding and demonstrates Nebraska’s compliance with federal requirements. A public hearing will tentatively be in June, with the draft plan to be available in May for a 30-day public viewing. Nicole and her team welcome feedback about the plan which will be found on the DHHS website at: <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Child-Care-and-Development-Fund-Plan.aspx>.

CCDF Relief Funding information was also shared that is providing an opportunity for Nicole and her team to explore how to best utilize funds from several sources over the next three years to best support Nebraska families and child care providers. Slides listed information and award amounts for the March 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and the December 2020 Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), as well as the March, 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act that was approved to provide more dollars for both the CARES and CRRSA efforts. A great deal of planning and internal discussions has been occurring along with outreach to child care partners to hear how these dollars could best support them. The Department is exploring covering copayments for families, and the system changes that may trigger, and some fiscal analysis. DHHS is also exploring large grants for communities that lack access to child care, including the 11 counties that have no licensed child care, and other potential grants for licensed child care providers. Nicole can be reached at nicole.vint@nebraska.gov or 402-471-9208.

Market Rate Survey (MRS) Update

Greg Welch is the Associate Director of Research and Evaluation at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and attends ECICC periodically to provide an update about the Market Rate Survey (MRS), a federal requirement of the Child Care and Development Block Grant, and part of state statute. The MRS collects data every two years from licensed child care providers across Nebraska over a 90-day period. He shared that some additions to the 2021 MRS include a shortened survey length, from 91 to 31 questions, and a three-phase, census approach that was used to gather data from as many providers as possible. The survey had an approximate 30% response rate, which Greg noted as being typical. Next steps include validating rates with DHHS and finalizing the report in late April, after which it will be posted on the DHHS website. Planning for the 2023 survey will launch in January of 2022 and include a cost study as well as exploring alternative data collection tools.

Information about the Market Rate Survey can be found on the DHHS website at:

<https://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Market-Rate-Survey.aspx>. Greg can be reached at gwelch@nebraska.edu or 402-554-2211. The Buffett Early Childhood Institute website can be found at: <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu>

Part C Update

Amy Bunnell, Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Early Childhood Special Education Supervisor and Early Development Network (EDN) Program Coordinator, first welcomed Jessica Anthony, the new Early Development Network Program Coordinator for DHHS. Jessica formerly worked as DHHS Early Development Network Program Specialist and has assumed her new Coordinator role, replacing Julie Doctor upon her retirement at the end of 2020.

Amy shared that the IDEA Part C Application is currently available for viewing through May 4, 2021. This annual application is to obtain federal grant funds awarded by the U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) each year to states to pay for the implementation of statewide Early Intervention programs. Once awarded Nebraska will receive approximately \$3 million dollars on or around July 1, 2021, Amy reminded the group about the things that funding is used for.

She also shared that there has been notice given about IDEA funding being included in the American Rescue Plan that was signed into law on March 11, 2021. This means there will be some additional Part B/619 and Part C funds made available; the Part C total for all states is \$250 million, and for preschool programs, \$200 million. The amount of funding for Nebraska hasn't yet been determined.

Head Start Update

Joan Luebbers, the Head Start State Collaboration Director, shared that her role is to foster partnerships between Head Start and state and local communities that support children and families that are at risk and low-income. A power point was shared that noted a recent announcement of a federal \$100 million would be awarded in grants for the expansion of either Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CC) or Early Head Start (EHS) programs. These programs serve a significant number of families who receive a child care subsidy. It helps increase the enrollment and lift the quality of programs can go to an existing or help create a new partnership. There are three EHS-CC Partnerships in Nebraska: Winnebago Tribal EHS, Blue Valley Community Action in Fairbury, and the Nebraska Early Childhood Collaborative out of Omaha, the latter of which has twice applied for and received funding for expansion. In NE there are 17 HS grantees and 18 EHS grantees. The awardees have not yet been announced as negotiations and information-gathering is still in process.

Head Start has also received some dollars to address the impact of the pandemic from the Covid-19 Response Funds. Additional Covid-related awards would be distributed Head Start programs across the county, noting that these grant dollars are in addition to the regular funding programs receive: \$750 million under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act; \$250 million being appropriated with FY21 budgeting under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act; and \$1 billion under the American Rescue Plan (ARP). Some additional information was shared about the American Rescue Plan Guide that is available and covers several subjects and would benefit any program that is utilizing ARP funding. The Guide can

be found at this link: <http://www.nhsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-American-Rescue-Plan-Head-Start.pdf>. Jennifer Auman, with the Nebraska Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (N-MIECHV) Program, thanked Joan for this update, saying there is community planning that will occur soon and build on these opportunities for collaboration. Joan can be reached at joan.luebbers@nebraska.gov or 531-207-9832.

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Early Childhood Leadership Academy

Kristine Luebbe, Director of Programs and Partnerships at the NDE Office of Early Childhood, introduced herself, sharing that she works with a team that works with school district-operated pre-Kindergarten programs and Head Start programs across the state. A PDG grant-funded project Kristine works with is the NAESP PreK-3 Leadership Academy. This project is in its second year and arose out of the awareness that within elementary schools, certified Principals who were leading early childhood programs don't necessarily have the needed skills or knowledge to be effective leaders for this audience. The National Association of Elementary School Principals was tapped to design a year-long Leadership Academy course with the intent and goal being that elementary principals will work and learn alongside Head Start and community-based Child Care Directors from the same communities to better support children along the entire learning continuum from birth to grade three. The intent is to have both online and in-person learning, with coursework designed by the NAESP. There are Nebraska advisors working with the cohort of leaders, and Nebraska-specific content. Kristine shared the original plan schedule, and then the actual schedule that has resulted from the disruptions created by the pandemic. The additional time needed to adjust has allowed some valuable partnerships to be developed, including work with the Buffett Early Child Institute to include Superintendents in the program, and opportunities to work with Directors within the Nebraska Head Start Association to bring on a Head Start Advisor. Kristine can be reached at kristine.luebbe@nebraska.gov or 531-510-8101.

Legislative Update

Adam Feser is a Policy Advisor at First Five Nebraska. He took the group to the First Five Nebraska website to walk through legislation regarding several bills that are in process during this session that are relevant to Early Childhood. These bills range from child care subsidy, appropriation for the Nebraska Early Learning Endowment Fund, immunization requirements for children entering child care, and a possible surtax on high-income individuals for the purpose of providing funds for early childhood education in Nebraska. Information about these bills can be found at this link: <http://www.firstfive-nebraska.org/public-policy-legislation/nebraska-legislation>. Adam can be reached at afeser@firstfive-nebraska.org or 402-261-9671.

Rooted in Relationships (RiR) Annual Evaluation

Rosie Zweiback, Associate Director of the Department of Education and Child Development at the Munroe-Meyer Institute presented with Nikki Roseberry about the Annual Rooted in Relationships Program Evaluation. Rosie presented in her role as Lead Evaluator for the Pyramid Model Project implementation within the Rooted in Relationships initiative. They shared that RiR, which is a Social-Emotional initiative, is based in 11 Nebraska communities and utilizes a "hub and spoke" model when growing RiR in communities. They begin with a stakeholder group and interested parties, and then branch out to other partners such as medical systems, parent organizations, etc. Nikki explained that RiR has a Community Work Plan that includes a two-piece structure of Early Childhood Systems and Pyramid Model Implementation with specific training and coaching structures.

Rosie shared some details about the interventions and supports that go directly to child caregivers across the state and noted the more recent impact of Covid on enrollment, health concerns, and income loss in these programs. Coaches also had to adjust the way they did "visiting," moving, instead, to Zoom and Facetime meetings, emails, and tech support. The support they provided also looked different when they, for instance, needed to help find wipes and other hygiene products for the centers they supported. The following quote from a Pyramid Coach was revealing, "I learned quickly that our teachers really needed someone checking in often to see if they were ok and to give them some validation and uplift." The Program Evaluation showed numbers served, provider demographics, as well as demographics of the children involved in Pyramid programs.

Rosie said there is rigorous evaluation of RiR, and this year, even with the many interruptions from Covid, they saw some nice growth from in-person observation in classrooms, as well as in the Benchmark of Quality surveys that programs completed. Several data pieces were shared that point to overall growth in the use of Pyramid. The home-based tool was not usable this year, but through the self-evaluation, it was found that Providers saw improvement with assistance from their Coaches.

Nikki wrapped up the presentation by sharing that they have learned much through the experience of adjusting to Covid, and that some unexpected partnerships have appeared that have proved helpful within those communities. She also mentioned they are developing Reflective Consultation training for all of their coaches, and are also starting to include child care directors, since many don't have leadership or supervisory training before they get to their roles. Rosie can be reached at zweibackr@unmc.edu and Nikki can be reached at nroseberry@nebraskachildren.org.

The Rooted in Relationships website: www.rootedinrelationships.org

Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) Update

In the interest of time, Lauri Cimino, Step Up to Quality Director at NDE, shared a brief update saying they are in the process of looking at improvements for the program with a goal of rolling them out in early 2022. A link to the website can be found below with information. Feedback from providers has been gathered with some positive reviews on possible changes to the various Steps. Lauri said there will soon be a recorded session on their website that will have more information. A more in-depth update will be provided at the August meeting. Lauri can be reached at lauri.cimino@nebraska.gov or at 402-333-6453.

The SUTQ website: <https://www.education.ne.gov/stepuptoquality/providers-educators/resources/updates/>

August Meeting Components & Other

Eleanor requested ideas for the August meeting. Members are welcome to email Karen who will bring suggestions to the Steering Committee for consideration when assembling the next agenda.

Member recruitment was also mentioned, as Eleanor reminded voting members to be watchful of when their terms end, and to try to help replace themselves on the Council. She is aware that there are some applications in the queue and is hopeful some of the current vacancies will be filled. There is a need for more rural membership as well as ethnic/racial/linguistic diversity on the Council to more accurately reflect what Nebraska looks like.

Meeting adjourned at 12:03pm

In closing, Mary shared a final thought, saying that if she had a gavel, she would pass it on to Karla Lester. Eleanor gave Mary thanks for her work on behalf of children and families, as she approaches her retirement.

Next Meeting: August 20, 2021, is scheduled for the SCC Jack J. Huck Continuing Education Center, 301 So. 68th Street Place, Lincoln, NE

**Council vote needed*

*** Public Comment Invited*

2021 ECICC meeting dates:

August 20
November 19

2022 ECICC meeting dates:

February 11
May 6
August 19
November 18

2023 ECICC meeting dates:

February 10
May 5
August 18
November 17