

Draft Minutes: Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council

August 20, 2021

Jack Huck Continuing Education Center

301 So. 68th St. Place, Lincoln, Nebraska

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Council Members Present: Anthony, Borchner, Bowen, Bunnell, Easter, Hobson, Lester, Luebbers, Marinovich, Thompson, Vint, Wilson

Members Absent: Freeny, Jara, Larsen, Ottoson

Also in Attendance: Council Facilitator, Eleanor Shirley; Co-Facilitator, Mary Phillips; Council Staff, Karen Hoffman; guest presenters Becky Veak and Jen Goettemoeller-Wendl

Note, in order to lower attendee numbers and enable better social distancing, the following Technical Assistants participated in the meeting via Zoom: Auman, Brehm, Cimino, Cromer, Feser, Frost, Johnson, Shockley, and Texel.

This quarterly meeting of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) commenced at 9:10a.m. Public notification of the meeting was on the Nebraska Department of Education website. The Public Meetings Notice was available in the back of the meeting room.

Welcome

ECICC Chair, Dr. Karla Lester, convened the meeting and acknowledged the hybrid format. Mary Phillips was introduced as an ECICC Co-Facilitator who would be observing today and more actively engaged in the future. Introductions were made for those present, including individual roles on the Council, as well as Technical Assistants who were present virtually.

***Approval of minutes – April 9, 2021**

Motion made and seconded by Bunnell and Vint respectively to approve the minutes from the April 9, 2021, meeting; roll-call vote was taken, and the motion passed.

Roll call vote: 11-yes, 1-abstain, 0-no

Yes: Anthony, Borchner, Bowen, Bunnell, Easter, Hobson, Lester, Luebbers, Thompson, Vint, Wilson

Abstain: Marinovich

Today's agenda was noted as being reviewed and approved.

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

Public comments were requested and there were none. Eleanor noted that today was the final meeting for Council members Sue Borchner, Carol Bowen, and Joan Luebbers. Sue and Carol had both served two consecutive terms, as well serving on the ECICC in the past. They were each thanked for their time and dedication to the Council. Joan Luebbers will be retiring the end of October and was also thanked for her many years of service to children and families in Nebraska and wished the best. Gwen Easter was recognized and congratulated for being appointed to the Governor's new Commission on African American Affairs, created through the enactment of legislative bill (LB) 918 and will have a number of focuses. It is a four-year term. Gwen also mentioned an upcoming event, Safe Haven's Early Childhood & Parent Network Reading Literacy and Healthy Education Conference, being held for providers and parents on August 28th at the Safe Haven Community Center in Omaha.

Member updates * Election of Vice-Chairperson

New member representing the Nebraska Department of Insurance, John Marinovich, was welcomed to the Council

for his first meeting. Nominations were taken from the floor to elect a new Vice-Chairperson to the Council. A written ballot was taken, and Paula Thompson was elected and thanked for her willingness to serve in this role.

Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Updates

Becky Veak, Early Childhood Policy Leadership Academy Manager at First Five Nebraska, and Jen Goettemoeller-Wendl, a consultant with Prairie Oak Publishing & Consulting, working with the Nebraska PDG (federal preschool development grant), shared updates that included a powerpoint. An overview was given about the three-year Preschool Development Grant, which is housed at the Department of Health and Human Services. The main goals for the PDG in Nebraska are to increase quality across the state in early care and education settings, increase parent information, and increase systems and how early childcare systems operate. Some current programs were highlighted and Becky shared that a public awareness campaign will occur next year to promote early childcare.

One of the PDG areas of emphasis is a Governance and Financing Task Force. An update about this group's work was the focus of today's presentation. It included a review of current state and private sector partnerships that are working together to move collaboration to a deeper level and see if there are gaps that could be addressed. Next steps include public awareness efforts and stakeholders' engagement opportunities to occur between October of this year through June of 2022. The Governance and Financing Task Force has representation from across the state and has created a preliminary recommendation: to be able provide full-day, year-around, high-quality early care and education, regardless of the setting.

The group was asked to provide input about current child care systems in Nebraska by answering the following two questions:

- 1) What are the "invisible" unmet needs you see?
- 2) If you could change/add/remove anything in the system, what would it be?

Becky shared that, as initiatives and models of oversight and funding are explored, the terms "Coordinated Model" and "Shared Leadership" are being utilized in Nebraska. Next steps include taking workgroup feedback out into the communities for input. The ECICC, being the advisory body for the PDG, is a first stop before heading out to gather stakeholder input, and the Council will continue to be utilized and updated as a part of this effort.

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program Update

Nicole Vint, Child Care and Development Fund Administrator, provided a powerpoint and updates. On April 15, 2020, the Nebraska COVID-19 Pandemic Executive Order No. 20-18 temporarily suspended some regulations related to child care. On June 30, 2021, the Governor announced that State of Emergency would end in 30 days, on July 30, 2021. The regulations were also approved and resulting changes implemented. More recently work has been happening for the Market Rate Survey. Current rates went into effect July 1, 2021, and will run for two years. Nicole explained some of the parameters around them. The Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan has also been submitted. This is the application to receive federal CCDF funding for a three-year period, and also demonstrates how Nebraska is either in or approaching compliance with federal requirements. Nicole also shared an update about Criminal History Background Checks, FBI Fingerprinting, and requirements and waivers around the timelines for obtaining both of these. She shared a slide with information regarding the current Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and how assistance will be provided based on income levels.

Early Childhood Update

Lynne Brehm shared a power point presentation update on behalf of Stephanni Renn, with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCF) regarding some high points in Early Childhood activities in Nebraska. Some additional Cares Act dollars came into the state and where those dollars went. Additional information about this can be found at <https://www.nebraskachildren.org/childcare-provider-funds--round-2-august-2021.html>.

A number of programs have enhanced some content to support providers, parents and their children in dealing with some of the challenges related to the pandemic. Both Circle of Security and Sixpence Programs have expanded in Nebraska, and slides shared those details.

Interagency Coordinating Council Best Practices - Working Lunch

ECICC Facilitator, Eleanor Shirley, shared a powerpoint presentation having attended an online training for State Interagency Coordinating Councils, or SICC. She reminded the group that Nebraska's Council is unique from other states in that it is a more integrated, inclusive and diverse advisory body that combines many related offices and efforts into one Council. Eleanor attended an online webinar that focused on effective practices of ICCs that was hosted by John Copenhaver, Program Director at TAESE – Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education. The webinar discussed Effective Practices that included six cluster areas: Purpose & Function, Membership, Meetings, Communication, Work of the Council, and Partnerships. Eleanor shared highlights from each of these and said if the November ECICC meeting has an orientation component, that John is available to take part in it.

Head Start Update

Joan Luebbers, State Head Start Director, shared a powerpoint presentation as part of her update. Joan shared that, while Head Start programs had shut down for three months due to Covid, they are all back up and running in-person. However, there is now a staff shortage, for a number of reasons, so there are challenges with having the correct child-to-staff ratio. Moving forward there is an effort to recruit families and get children back into Head Start. Joan also mentioned "Ready Rosie," a curriculum support model, offered with a grant from the PDG. The program is being implemented in approximately 900 classrooms in Head Start, Early Head Start and public Preschool programs.

Part C Update

Amy Bunnell, Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Early Childhood Special Education Supervisor and Early Development Network (EDN) Program Coordinator, provided an update and a powerpoint. Amy shared that the federally required annual Part C Federal report was due February 1, 2021, and was submitted. Data had been shared with the Council in November of 2020, and February of 2021. The ECICC Chairperson at the time, Mary Phillips, certified the report before it was submitted. Nebraska learned it was awarded a "Meets Requirements" grade from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education. Nebraska's Annual Performance Report (APR) is available at: <http://edn.ne.gov/cms/annual-performance-reports-apr>. There is also a report regarding Nebraska's Planning Region Teams (PRTs) data that is compiled, and this can be found at: <http://edn.ne.gov/cms/regional-public-reporting-tables>. Finally, the annual IDEA Part C Application for Federal funds was submitted on May 1, 2021, and was awarded for the period of July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022. Nebraska was awarded a little over \$3 million of which funding is based upon the number of infants and toddlers served the previous calendar year.

Relief Funding Updates

A compiled powerpoint presentation was shared by a number of individuals regarding the three funding awards: the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) – provided in March 2020, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) – December, 2020, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) – March 2021. Jessica Anthony, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Program Coordinator, Early Development Network, began by sharing about Part C funding and some of the efforts those additional dollars will be used for between July 1, 2021 and September 30, 2023. Some examples included enhancing ChildFind activities and technology support for EDN providers.

Next, Melody Hobson, Office of Early Childhood Administrator, shared an update of how Early Childhood has utilized ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funding, sharing that 14 statewide, roundtable discussions and a survey of nearly 450 respondents provided guidance for five areas of focus by NDE to support schools and families. Some examples include providing access to comprehensive mental health services, reimagining family and community engagement, and developing high-quality professional learning opportunities and bolstering the teacher pipeline.

Nicole Vint shared how Relief Funding awards have been utilized by DHHS specific to child care programs. CARES dollars went to child care providers, afterschool and school aged programs, the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network website, and School Age Subsidy. CRRSA funds were used both as supplemental grants for child care

providers, and to support LB 485, which changed provisions related to child care assistance in Nebraska. APRA funding includes both Discretionary and Stabilization dollars, and Nicole shared that Discretionary dollars, similar to what Jessica and Melody described, will be used to support child care providers, children, families, and communities, while Stabilization dollars will continue to support LB 485 as well as some new efforts that are still in the planning stages. An upcoming statewide “listening tour” will gather input from providers about their needs and priorities so that Discretionary dollars will be used to address grassroots needs with some possible “outside of the box” ideas and solutions. CCDF Grant Coordinator with DHHS and ECICC Technical Assistant, Beckie Cromer, shared planning details for the Stabilization grant that included possible parameters being explored to allocate the \$143 million dollars. Examples included funding for underserved and high poverty areas, and providers who offer non-traditional hours. Nicole finished the update by reporting when Stabilization funding becomes available, there will be a dedicated, bi-lingual call center to help with questions, and that the Council will be relied upon to help with communication to the field.

Next, Jenni Auman, Program Manager for the Nebraska-Maternal, Infant & Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (N-MIECHV) shared that the \$140,750 in awarded funds was divided among the seven Local Implementing Agencies for use in direct response to Covid-19 public health emergencies. A slide listed the seven allowable uses and examples that Jenni shared included grocery cards, car seats, books, safety supplies, travel vouchers, and nursing supplies.

Finally, Joan Luebbers, Nebraska Head Start Collaboration Director, informed the group about how funding benefitted Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) programs that serve the age group of prenatal to five years old. CARES Act dollars were awarded to HS grantees for summer services for children entering kindergarten and/or those with developmental disabilities. CRRSA dollars provided additional pandemic-related funding for increased expenses needed for safe and effective services for children and families, and included virtual and remote services, mental health care and counseling to families and the HS work force. Finally, ARPA funds supported HS programs in building back toward full in-person services beginning the fall of 2021, and included vaccinations for staff and families, mental health support for children and families, and virtual and remote services. Joan also shared a slide that listed how funding for each of the three Acts was divided per child based upon enrollment. Resources were also shared including the following website where information can be found about the Head Start Forward Campaign: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/coronavirus/head-start-forward-campaign-overview>

LB 83 Public Meeting Changes

Eleanor provided an update about this legislation and how it pertains to the ECICC. LB 83 was passed to accommodate emergency issues with meetings, which included limitations such as broadband and internet access across the state. If deemed necessary, fifty percent of required Open Meetings may now be conducted virtually. In the case of the ECICC, this would mean two per year. Eleanor took the group through the number of specific requirements of having a virtual meeting. In brief, there must be an affirmative vote by the Council, adequate public notice, three designated and staffed public sites with a minimum of one hard copy of materials available. Eleanor emphasized that “reasonable” arrangements must be made for the public to have opportunity for public comment and participate in the meeting. Preliminary discussion pertinent to the February meeting, typically a weather-related challenge, may be deemed appropriate as a virtual session. The Steering Committee will continue this conversation and keep the Council informed as meeting plans move forward.

Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) Update

Lauri Cimino, Step Up to Quality Director, completed a program update that added to what had been shared at the April meeting. She was pleased to share that services had been reinstated and were moving forward in a safe manner following a suspension due to Covid. She gave an overview of the previous year plus some data that had been gathered. Step Up to Quality is currently serving 590 programs translating to over 33,813 children served since 2014. Growth is still happening even with the pandemic and there are over 1000 programs with profiles in the Professional Records System. She shared the breakdown of participants saying that 50% of programs include child care providers who operate in the home. Next, Lauri took the group to the SUTQ website to share the new feature where people who are looking for a provider who is participating in the program can search by entering their zip

code, selecting an age group, and the type of program they are seeking. This search is pulled from the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System (NECPRS) and lists at what step the program currently is. Lauri said this is thought to be a nice marketing tool. The website can be found here: <https://stepuptoquality.ne.gov/>

November Meeting Components

Eleanor asked the group for agenda suggestions for the Steering Committee to consider. In addition to the usual updates, suggestions were shared including:

- Infant Mental Health presentation
- Assistive Technology Partnership update with ATP Supervisor, Brian Wojcik
- Presentation about an Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (EHDI) pilot program
- Biennial Report work

Eleanor reminded the group about the five areas of Council focus: quality, standards, collaboration & coordination, professional development, and data.

Dr. Lester adjourned the meeting at 2:00pm

The next scheduled meeting is Friday, November 19, 2021, at the SCC Jack J. Huck Continuing Education Center, 301 So. 68th Street Place, Lincoln, NE

2021 ECICC meeting dates

- November 19

2022 ECICC proposed meeting dates

- February 11
- May 6
- August 19
- November 18

2023 ECICC proposed meeting dates

- February 10
- May 5
- August 18
- November 17

**Council vote needed*

*** Public Comment Invited*