

Draft Minutes: Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council

November 19, 2021

Via zoom and in-person at the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), 500 So. 84th Street, Room D, Lincoln, NE

Council members present: Anthony, Bowen, Bunnell, Easter, Freeny, Hobson, Howard, Jara, Larsen, Lester, Luebbers, Marinovich, Nunemaker, Ottoson, Thompson, Vint, Wilson

Council members excused: Borchert, Robinson

Also in Attendance: Council Facilitators, Shirley and Phillips; Council Secretary, Hoffman; Technical Assistants, Auman, Brehm, Cimino, Cromer, Feser, Frost, Johnson, Renn, and Shockley; guest presenters: Kym Caddell, Alex Daro, Holly Hatten-Bowers, Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal

This quarterly meeting of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) commenced at 9:05a.m. Public notification of the meeting was on the Nebraska Department of Education website and in the Omaha World Herald. The Public Meetings Notice was available online and onsite at the Department of Education, Conference room D.

Council Meeting Convenes

ECICC Chair, Dr. Karla Lester, convened the meeting at 9:05a.m. and welcomed the group, asking that when someone speaks for the first time, to share one thing he or she is thankful for.

Facilitator Eleanor Shirley noted the Open Meetings Act, LB83, was located on the NDE website as well as hard copies in the room at NDE.

***Approval of minutes – August 20, 2021**

Motion made by Bunnell and seconded by Marinovich to approve the minutes from the August 20, 2021, meeting; roll-call vote taken, the motion passed.

Roll call vote: 11-yes, 5-abstain, 0-no

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

Abstain: Howard, Jara, Larsen, Nunemaker, Ottoson

The meeting agenda was noted as being reviewed and approved. Eleanor noted three new members, two of whom were in attendance: Ken Howard, State Homeless Education Liaison with NDE, and Michelle Nunemaker, System of Care Administrator with DHHS. New member and Educational Service Unit Representative, Nora Robinson, was unable to attend the meeting.

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

Karla thanked Karen for assembling and mailing out some informational folders to the group. Karla also congratulated Council member and Child Care and Development Fund Administrator, Nicole Vint, for receiving an Excellence in Leadership Award and an Admiralship from Governor Ricketts.

Child Care and Development Fund Administrator (CCDF) Update

Nicole Vint shared an update about this annually awarded block grant that supports childcare subsidy recipients and various quality standard initiatives across the state. The Stabilization Grant, which is part of the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA), gave the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) \$143 million dollars in funding to assist childcare providers. The grant, which opened October 25th for a first round and runs through November 24th, includes an online application and a phone number applicants may call. Deloitte is the contracted company managing applications and initial reviews. Nicole noted a very positive response with over 1500 applications received as of the meeting. An outbound campaign will seek to reach those with incomplete applications or who have yet to apply. Following

application review, initial payments will go out to approved recipients, with a second payment in March 2022. Nicole noted that, based on Federal guidance, only providers licensed prior to March 11, 2021, are eligible for the first round. A second round will open in the Spring of 2022 targeting providers licensed after March 11, and/or who did not apply in round one. More information will come as plans are developed.

DHHS still has some discretionary funds from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act that provided dollars issued December 27th, as part of the APRA Act. Input is being sought about utilizing these time-limited funds. Over 400 childcare providers have given input during listening sessions across the state, sharing the challenges and barriers of working through a pandemic, and how these funds could help them. Information is being provided to the Governor's office through a series of meetings and the Council will have an update in December.

In closing, Nicole shared that funding to support LB485, which raised the subsidy eligibility level from 130% to 185% of poverty level, is currently temporary but there is hope it will extend beyond the pilot.

Addressing a question about whether there will be training available for childcare providers of children with challenging behaviors, who are sometimes asked to leave a setting, Nicole acknowledged this concern, saying there have been meetings regarding that very subject. The goal is to keep children in their childcare setting and educate their providers. Nicole can be reached via email at nicole.vint@nebraska.gov.

Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Update – Needs Assessment

Shannon Mitchell-Boekstal, Assistant Vice President at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and Early Childhood/PDG Program Manager, shared a brief powerpoint with the vision and goals that are guiding the ongoing work of the grant. An overall focus of the PDG is to align state systems and help Nebraska families access quality childcare. The grant ends in 2023 and conversations are happening about sustainability of projects and efforts once this occurs. A slide showed projects currently underway within the PDG and plans for year three were noted. In addition, Shannon shared that American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are being used for continued development in some key areas.

The Family Engagement Workgroup was specifically noted as developing a parent survey to gather input for planning a future family conference that will foster leadership and advocacy for parents in Nebraska. Shannon asked the Council to share the survey with any parents they work with. Links are below and available in four languages. More information will be shared at the next meeting. Anyone with questions may reach out to Shannon via email at:

SBoekstal@nebraskachildren.org

Family Conference parent survey:

- English: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/familyeng>
- Spanish: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/familyespanol>
- Vietnamese: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/familyviet>
- Karen: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/familykaren>

Next, Alex Daro, Research Specialist at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and Co-Principal Investigator of the Needs Assessment, introduced herself and her colleague and fellow Research Specialist, Kym Caddell. They shared a powerpoint and overview regarding the Needs Assessment work underway for the PDG. Family and parent outreach efforts have occurred in both 2019 and 2021, and input gathered relating to family perceptions of access, quality, family engagement and choice, access to services, and health and well-being. Emerging themes were noted about what families are looking for and the vulnerabilities many are experiencing. Efforts will continue to gather input and hear more voices, especially from families and children experiencing homelessness in both metro and urban areas in Nebraska. Meeting participants were asked to send insight and ideas to Alex and Kym about this and other populations they should reach out to. A link to the Nebraska Child Care Referral Network was shared - www.nechildcarereferral.org. Alex and Kym may be reached at adaro@nebraska.edu and kymberlycaddell@nebraska.edu.

Eleanor noted the role of new Council member, Ken Howard, as the Homeless Education Program Director at NDE, could be timely for gathering input from this population. A few minutes were, then, taken so both he and fellow new member, Michelle Nunemaker, could introduce themselves and share some background.

Early Childhood Update

Melody Hobson, NDE Early Childhood Administrator, gave an update regarding a Coach Collaboration project connected to PDG work, sharing that a Coach Coordination Specialist was hired to work with Coach Consultants on a number of initiatives. There are also plans to expand Ready Rosie, a program utilizing video modeling and mobile technology that is sent from teachers to parents and promotes family engagement in families with children from birth through the third grade. Funds are being used to help expand this work with the hope that school districts will continue it after the grant ends. Melody noted a Request for Proposal (RFP) will be going out soon to all school districts to either start or expand an Early Child Program, with funding coming through the state aid formula for four- year-olds. Interest will be measured in the Spring of 2022, as will what funding may be available.

Finally, Melody noted the National Association of Elementary School Principals Leadership Academy, which has had two cohorts, will begin accepting applications for a third in December for up to 30 people. The goal is to have community representatives expand their knowledge around various early childhood subjects and program needs and experience the program together so they can better collaborate in the future. Melody can be reached via email at melody.hobson@nebraska.gov.

Head Start Update

Melody noted that this would be Joan Luebbers last meeting before retiring later in December. Joan served as NDE's Part C Coordinator before moving to the Head Start Collaboration Office, and the group thanked her for her service to the Department of Education, to the Office of Early Childhood, and especially to the children and young families of Nebraska.

The Covid 19 pandemic has created many challenges for childcare programs. Joan shared that while Head Start requires 100% full enrollment and a waiting list, full enrollment remains suspended through the end of the year without penalties to programs. There is also increased flexibility for service delivery and various screening requirements, all due to the various effects of Covid. Joan said conversations with statewide Head Start Directors have revealed staffing concerns due to vaccination requirements shared by the Biden Administration, and that related guidance is anticipated from the Office of Head Start.

Next, Joan announced that Steph Knust will be the next Nebraska Head Start Collaboration Office Director, after completing her post as the director for Midland University/Dodge County Head Start in Fremont. Steph, who has served on the ECICC in the past, brings 20 years of experience in leadership and partnering at the community, state, and national levels, and will begin her new role on December 20, 2021.

Finally, a slide was shown with information about the Head Start Forward Campaign, which supports grantees in reaching more children and families and moving toward fully in-person comprehensive services, as local health conditions allow. Joan can be reached via email at joan.luebbers@nebraska.gov. Steph Knust's contact information will be shared once she has come on board.

Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH)

Lynne Brehm, ECICC Technical Assistant, and Vice President at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, introduced Holly Hatton-Bowers. Holly is an assistant professor and Early Childhood Extension Specialist for Children, Youth and Family Studies with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a primary interest in areas of parenting, early childhood education with an emphasis on the well-being of caregivers and children's social emotional development. It was noted that November is Early Childhood Mental Health Awareness Month, and that "infant mental health" is a key area of early childhood mental health.

Holly shared some background about herself and the programs she has taken part in that have fostered her commitment to the topic of infant and early childhood mental health. Some videos and information were shared. Holly emphasized

that infant and early childhood mental health is about a relationship, its context, and the responsivity of a trusted caregiver that will support a child's development, even at a very young age. According to brain science, investing in child development during the first five years of life helps build a foundation for a more successful and viable society. Therefore, training of childcare providers, home visitors, preschool teachers, families, and communities could provide important support for infants and young children's social and emotional needs. Holly said this could include more onsite visits from mental health professionals but that, unfortunately, there is a national shortage of people with the needed skills to provide these supports. Some ways to foster positive ECMH were shared, with one example being a "serve and return" exchange where a child "serves," or reaches out for interaction, and a responsive caregiver "returns" by providing some type of a reaction. Holly may be reached via email at hattonb@unl.edu.

Part C Update

Amy Bunnell, Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Early Childhood Special Education Supervisor and Early Development Network (EDN) Program Coordinator, along with Jessica Anthony, with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and the Part C Data Manager, and ECICC Technical Assistant, Cole Johnson, presented information about the Part C Annual Performance Report and setting of targets. Any states receiving IDEA funds must have a State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) that evaluates efforts to implement early intervention programs. These reports are submitted to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) on February first of each year, and describe the process used to set targets. The ECICC is an important stakeholder body for hearing and providing input. Targets are set every five years and it is a federal requirement that states show improvement each year.

Each indicator was described, and considerations shared, which included how service delivery has been affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Charts for each indicator included the last four years of data and how targets for the next five years could evolve. Consultants were utilized to assist in setting realistic targets while taking into the account the impacts of Covid and how long it may be before those affects are alleviated. Since Federal funding is dependent upon targets being met, this is extremely important. Amy, Jessica, and Cole may be reached at the following email addresses: amy.bunnell@nebraska.gov, Jessica.anthony@nebraska.gov, and cole.johnson@nebraska.gov.

Governor's Biennial Report

Council Facilitators, Eleanor Shirley and Mary Phillips, shared a powerpoint about the Biennial Report to the Governor. It is prepared by the ECICC and given to both the Governor and members of the Legislature and is about the status of early care and education in Nebraska. Report elements were shared as was a potential timeline for creating the 2018-2020 report, which is overdue, largely due to pandemic conditions and inability of ECICC to meet regularly in 2020. Furthermore, ECICC delegates were unable to get on the Governor's schedule to review and receive input relative to the 2016-2018 report. Options for next steps were shared based on past reports, and the group was asked to send any additional thoughts or ideas for moving forward to Karen to share with the Steering Committee.

To move forward with a goal of sending the next report to the Governor and Legislature in May of 2022, the Steering Committee will plan to identify a writing team that will convene and review progress made since the 2016-2018 report, make recommendations for possible revisions, and present a draft to the Council for input and eventual approval at the meeting on May 6. Mary asked group members to also consider how everyone, given his or her role on the Council and in the community, can eventually help distribute and discuss the report in their respective circles.

Mary shared practicalities of the report:

Use the existing 2016-18 Report & Executive Summary to update and engage members in ZOOM breakout sessions to discuss the next draft during the February 2022 ECICC Meeting. The Chair and a parent member typically meet with the Governor to highlight areas of the completed report and receive input from the Governor's office. All State legislators are required to receive the report when completed. The Council was asked to consider their respective constituents and stakeholders to share and discuss the report.

Membership Updates & February Meeting Components

Eleanor noted the current ECICC roster and vacancies. The group was encouraged to help with recruitment by shepherding them to the online application on the Governor's website. Paula Thompson, Vice-Chair, made a motion for

the Steering Committee to create and coordinate an Ad Hoc membership committee to assist with the recruitment of new members. Melody Hobson seconded the motion. Discussion included a question as to whether it was appropriate for the family member of a current member to apply for appointment. Consensus was as long as he/she fulfills the role, there are no issues. It was noted that it is very helpful for a member of the Steering Committee to be told when someone has made an application, so it may be passed on to the Governor's office. The application is linked on the ECICC website.

*Roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed: 13-yes, 1-abstain, 0-no

Yes: Bowen, Bunnell, Easter, Freeny, Hobson, Jara, Luebbers, Marinovich, Nunemaker, Ottoson, Thompson, Vint, Wilson

Abstain: Anthony

Following the vote Chairperson Karla Lester encouraged those interested in serving on the time-limited Ad Hoc committee to let Karen know. The committee will need to establish roles and responsibilities, strategies, and a timeline. Eleanor reminded the group that the Bylaws provide guidance for Ad Hoc committees and encouraged members to read and be familiar with them.

Suggestions for possible February agenda items included the Ad Hoc committee work, Biennial report, and Bylaws clarification. The group was encouraged to send additional ideas to Karen. Chairperson Lester called for adjournment at 12:30p.m.

Next meeting: The ECICC Steering Committee has decided that the February 11, 2022, meeting will be held virtually for members. This is to address the high probability of inclement weather and the need for there to be a quorum to conduct Council business. The ECICC will adhere to requirements established by LB 83 regarding virtual meetings.

2022 ECICC proposed meeting dates

- February 11 - virtual
- 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*

ECICC facilitators:

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