

## **Draft Minutes:** Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) – February 13, 2026

The meeting was held virtually with staff in-person in Conference room 265 at the Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln, NE.

Council members present: Anthony, Bittner, Bunnell, Carmoney, Flood, Gemar, Gomes, Hobson, Jara, Kilgore, Knust, Kresser, Lada, Layman, Marinovich, Peterson, Ray, Rayburn, Rotert, Schmidt, Schroder, Vanderford. Council members excused: Packard, Vint.

Also in attendance: Council Facilitator, Phillips; Council Secretary, Hoffman; Technical Assistants Auman, Braddock, Bradley, Cimino, Clark, Johnson, Jones, Shockley

*This quarterly meeting of the Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ECICC) commenced at 9:00a.m. Public notification of the meeting was on the Nebraska Department of Education website and in the Omaha World Herald. The Public Meetings Act was available online and onsite in the meeting room. Presentation materials may be found in this [GoogleDocs](#) folder.*

### **Council Meeting Convenes**

ECICC Chairperson, Amber Jara, called the meeting to order at 9:00a.m. and led introductions that included sharing of names and roles on the Council. The Open Meetings Act was noted as being in the room at NDE.

### **Election of Vice Chairperson**

Following nominations that were submitted by appointed members via a provided GoogleDoc link, a vote was taken by another GoogleDoc, and Dr. Gina Bittner was elected as ECICC Vice Chairperson. Gratitude was shown to Gina as well as the other nominees willing to serve.

### **Approval of minutes – November 7, 2025**

Motion made and seconded respectively by Bittner and Marinovich to approve the minutes from the November 7, 2025, ECICC meeting; roll-call vote was taken, the motion passed.

Roll call vote: Yes – 21; Abstain - 1

Yes: Anthony, Bittner, Bunnell, Carmoney, Flood, Gemar, Hobson, Jara, Kilgore, Knust, Lada, Layman, Packard, Peterson Marinovich, Ray, Rayburn, Rotert, Schmidt, Schroder, Vanderford

Abstain: Gomes

### **Public Comment:**

Amy Bunnell shared about the upcoming [Nebraska Young Child Institute](#) happening June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> in Kearney at the Younes Conference Center North. Registration will start on February 24<sup>th</sup> and information will be shared with the Council. For voting, non-agency members wishing to attend, all expenses would be covered under Part C. Please watch for information to be sent out; members are encouraged to respond back to Karen if interested.

Dr. Gina Bittner shared about two upcoming events at Peru State College: A Dr. Seuss Birthday Bash, being held on Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup> is geared towards children PK-4th grade, free of charge, and with performances at both 9:00a.m. and 1:00p.m. A Career Challenge event for students who receive lifeskills support through their special education department is on April 8<sup>th</sup> and is geared towards students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade through age 21. Gina encouraged those interested in more information to reach out to her at [gbittner@peru.edu](mailto:gbittner@peru.edu).

## **Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Update**

Shela Jones, CCDF Aid Administration and ECICC Technical Assistant, shared a brief but exciting update that Nebraska had received a third Preschool Development Grant (PDG), and that guest presenter, Jackie Farrell, would be sharing more indepth information later in the agenda. Shela can be reached at [shela.jones@nebraska.gov](mailto:shela.jones@nebraska.gov).

## **Early Childhood Update**

Melody Hobson, Administrator for the NDE Office of Early Childhood, shared a number of items including recent updates made to Rule 11 regarding regulations for the approval of prekindergarten programs having been approved by the State Board of Education, and are now at the next stage with the Governor's office. Melody also shared about the [Nebraska Literacy Project](#) which provides a framework for Nebraska educators and other stakeholders to work together to positively impact literacy for all Nebraska students. Additional literacy resources can be found at the following link:

<https://www.education.ne.gov/nebraskareads/literacy-resources/>. Melody can be reached at [melody.hobson@nebraska.gov](mailto:melody.hobson@nebraska.gov).

## **Head Start Update**

Head Start State Collaboration Director, Steph Knust, shared a powerpoint presentation with a number of items including Eligibility Criteria, and Nebraska Program enrollment data and updates, noting an \$85M increase for Head Start cost of living adjustments. A number of resource links were also shared. Steph can be reached at [steph.knust@nebraska.gov](mailto:steph.knust@nebraska.gov).

## **Part C Update**

Director of Early Childhood Special Education and Early Development Network Coordinator, Amy Bunnell, shared a powerpoint with a number of updates related to Part C, the federal grant program that mandates states to provide early intervention services for infants and toddlers, birth to age three, with developmental delays or disabilities. The Part C Annual Performance Report (APR) had a due date of February 2, 2026, and was delivered on time to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). A link will be shared with the Council once it is available. The annual IDEA Part C Application will be completed once the template is made available by the US Department of Education. Awarded funds are available July 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, preceeded by the application and public review and comment process. Amy can be reached at [amy.bunnell@nebraska.gov](mailto:amy.bunnell@nebraska.gov).

## **Legislative Update**

First Five Nebraska (FFN) Policy Advisor and ECICC Technical Assistant, Mitch Clark, shared a powerpoint and link to a Legislative [watch list](#). There are some carry-over bills from last year's session, and Mitch said that all introduced bills will receive hearings with general file, select file, and final reading sessions. The state is in a \$470 million budget deficit, which is being addressed. Mitch mentioned LB898 which allows more flexibility for advisory bodies, changing in-person requirements from half of the scheduled meetings to just one per year. If passed, this would affect the ECICC. He also shared a link to a [resource page](#) regarding LB304 and advocating for the child care subsidy. Mitch can be reached at [mclark@firstfivenebraska.org](mailto:mclark@firstfivenebraska.org).

## **Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Updates**

Jackie Farrell, Vice President of Systems Alignment with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, shared about the recently awarded PDG grant. It will consist of a one-year planning period to streamline work with systems alignment for early childhood systems (birth-five) in Nebraska, emphasizing coordination, quality, workforce and data. PDG elements, categories, and outcome strategies were shared. Jackie can be reached at [jfarrell@nebraskachildren.org](mailto:jfarrell@nebraskachildren.org).

### **NAIMH & RiR Annual Report Updates**

Sami Bradley, Vice President at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation (NCFF), and ECICC Technical Assistant, first shared an update about the Rooted in Relationship (RiR) [Annual Report](#), saying that this early childhood mental health initiative has been in place for 12 yrs. She shared some background information and discussed social emotional impacts of mental health on developing children.

Next Sami shared an update about NAIMH (Nebraska Association for Infant Mental Health). There are currently 60 people endorsed with an Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMH-E), which brings valuable focus to the rapid growth of infant and toddler developmental needs. Sami said that there will be ongoing work with Zero to Three, an early childhood development organization that supports caring adults who make a difference in the lives of children and toddlers. Finally, Sami mentioned a Professional Development Survey that occurred in 2025 and revealed what types of trainings are wanted from the field. Some free trainings will occur during the Week of the Young Child, April 13-17, sponsored by NAIMH, some of which will be offered in Spanish.

### **May 1st meeting & components**

Mary shared that the next ECICC meeting will be held in-person, and hopefully at the SCC Jack Huck Continuing Education Center. Karen will send out a call for agenda items in mid-March and the group was encouraged to email ideas to her at any time.

Chairperson, Amber Jara, adjourned the meeting by consensus at 11:25am.