

MINUTES
November 13, 2008
Marlboro, Massachusetts

Members Present: Robin Adair, Zulmira Allcock, Kristin Britton, Darleen Corbett, Kelly Ann Coyne, Jen DerBogossian, Jen Greco, Jack Harris, Karin Lifter, Margaret Mahoney, Anne Marsh, Sara Miranda, Kimber O’Connell, Nancy Phillips, Kathie Rose, Ronna Schaffer, Joanne Sweeney, Arlene Tannenbaum, Amy Young.

Members Absent: Jennifer Amaya Thompson, Richard Breault, Pat Cameron, Sandra Daly, Pam Kuechler, Peggy Lee, Neal Michaels, Therese Murphy-Miller, Lois Aldrich, Nancy Schwartz, Pam Wildnauer, Joanne Williams.

Non-Voting Committee Chairs in Attendance: Rena Ginsberg, Cindy Warren, Peter Woodbury.

1. Welcome: Co-Chairperson Amy Young welcomed the group. She announced changes in ICC membership and responsibility: Zulmira Allcock is the new Chair of the Standards Committee. Kelly Ann Coyne is the new Greater Boston Parent Representative. Margaret Mahoney is now Tri-Co-Chairperson, and is joined in this role by Joanne Williams and Kimber O’Connell. Joanne Sweeney is the new representative of the MEIC – the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium.

Review of ICC Retreat: Amy noted that the ICC and many members of the EI community participated in the ICC Retreat held October 2 and 3, 2008. Trends, challenges and action steps that were discussed have been summarized and sent to Steering Committee, which will work on the charges to each committee for the coming year. Amy reminded the group that much of the important work of the ICC takes place in these committees.

2. Approval of Minutes: The Minutes of the ICC meeting held June 12, 2008, were approved as written.

3. Director’s Report – Ron Benham: Ron welcomed a group of graduate students from the Early Intervention graduate training program at Wheelock College.

Budget updates: Ron reported that the Early Intervention program at the Department of Public Health had given back over \$1 million as part of the Governor’s recent 9-C cuts; the Governor has authority to make these cuts in the agencies that are under his control. To absorb the cuts, \$100,000 was taken from Regional Consultation Programs and \$200,000 from the Pediatric Palliative Care Program for children with life threatening and life limiting conditions. The remainder must come from “regular EI,” necessitating a change in the eligibility requirement from 25% to 30% delay as of early January, 2009. Ron cautioned that the system is growing at a faster rate, in both dollars and numbers of children served, than had been projected. He also clarified that the Fiscal Committee of the ICC will be the locus of planning for any further changes that may be necessary in FY 2009 and FY 2010; the MEIC had discussed forming an ad hoc group, but that will not be necessary.

A deficit of about \$4 million is projected for FY 2010. The system is subject to forces outside our control. For example, multiple screening efforts are being implemented; they are appropriate and necessary, but also underfunded. Some providers think moving to 30% delay for eligibility will reduce

the numbers of children coming into the system more than the Department estimates, but this has to play itself out. A rate increase is badly needed; however, if the economy doesn't recover, it could necessitate additional trade-offs. Rob Seymour and Steve McCourt are working on FY 2010 financial projections which take into account Mass Health's decision to pay for all services provided by developmental specialists. An Interagency Service Agreement would be required in order to move necessary funds from the Department of Public Health to MassHealth during the transitional year; after that, Mass Health would bear the full cost for those children. In addition, it seems very likely that Mass Health and private insurers will cover services provided by physical, occupational and speech therapy assistants effective July 1, 2009.

The following points were made in discussion: Without an increase in the federal allocation of Part C funding to Massachusetts, the system could be forced to make further changes such as deeper eligibility cuts. The alternative is to drop out of Part C, but if that happens, programs would once again have waiting lists. The Department would lose the funding stream that pays for many of its EI staff, and almost nothing could be paid for other than direct service. The family participation fee is not currently on the table – no changes are anticipated. There is movement, both in Massachusetts and at the federal level, toward paying for autism services that are now the sole responsibility of the Department. If this were to be federally mandated, it would be a huge relief.

The recent verification visit from OSEP – the federal Office of Special Education Programs – produced the best of results: There were no findings. Our Massachusetts system was praised; it has a national reputation for excellence. Ron thanked Patti Fougere and all of the other Department staff who worked so hard to bring this about.

4. Presentation: Final Recommendations for Certified Early Intervention Specialist Competency Indicators – Holly Newman: Holly is the DPH staff person in charge of the required CSPD (Comprehensive System of Personnel Development). The Department, with input from the EI community, has undertaken a systematic review of the competencies required of anyone who works in Massachusetts Early Intervention 20 hours per week or more. After three years of employment, these staff must submit portfolios demonstrating how they have met the competency requirements.

Holly distributed four handouts: A cover letter dated November, 2008; *Summary of Public Comment, Revised CEIS Competency Indicators, November 13, 2008*; *Public Commentary – CEIS Competency Indicator Review – August-September 2008*; *Draft Final CEIS Competency Indicators*. She stressed that no one is required to change anything at this time. There will be an “extended and methodical process of converting to the new system.” There was an effort to reduce the overall number of competencies, as well as to simplify language and make them more consistent. Holly thanked everyone who has been involved; her email is in the cover letter, and complete documents are available on request. Amy Young clarified that, at its January 8, 2009, meeting, the ICC will vote on whether to recommend the revised competencies to DPH, and the Department would then be responsible for implementation.

5. Committee Reports. Standards Committee – Zulmira Allcock: While the committee awaits federal regulations that may require some work on our Operational Standards, members are considering the changes necessary in order to add therapy assistants to the list of billable staff. In July, 2009, our systematic every-five-years review of Operational Standards will begin. **Personnel Preparation Committee – Rena Ginsburg:** The committee recently met with representatives of higher education. Higher education is being encouraged to submit proposals for the MEIC Annual Conference in May. The committee is also discussing student loan forgiveness, while acknowledging that this is not one of its assigned responsibilities.

Program Planning Committee – Cindy Warren: Cindy explained that, last spring, the committee had presented its recommendations to the ICC regarding social emotional well being, and a vote will be taken today. She distributed the committee’s *Vision*, including practice recommendations regarding screening. Two specific questions were answered: 1) While a child and family may experience use of a screening tool more than once because other programs in the community may be using the same tool, this usually leads to increased comfort with the process because families gain practice in discussing the issues. 2. The tool should be used – but not d – with infants under three months of age. **Vote: It was moved and seconded that the Vision Statement and recommendations to the Department be approved. ICC members voted unanimously in favor of the motion.**

Specialty Services – Tracy Osbahr for Tom Miller: A second meeting of the Autism Forum will take place November 19, 2008. Hot topics will include Robin Adair speaking about screening, implementation of a fast track assessment, and recommendations regarding screening of infants. As a result of the forums held thus far, a number of concerned groups connected with each other. Mary Ann Mulligan, the MEIC’s legislative advocate, has become involved regarding the need for legislation to support insurance reimbursement for autism services. Tracy distributed a handout, dated November 2008, *Partnering for the Success of Children with Hearing Loss – Task Force Report*. She explained that a series of community forums had led to development of a Task Force. National initiatives and guidelines were reviewed. The resulting report details issues, barriers and recommendations to overcome the many challenges facing families of children who are hearing impaired.

Fiscal Committee – Peter Woodbury: Peter reported that Massachusetts received the anticipated federal waiver from Medicaid. This relieves some of the pressure created by implementation of Universal Health Care in Massachusetts and this provides significant relief to the EI system. Peter reviewed the status of claims payments for FY 2007 and 2008. The fate of an anticipated class rate increase is unknown at this time, and the potential for additional 9-C cuts is another unknown. The committee made a list of data points it thinks should be made available in order to better anticipate changes in numbers of children served and the types of services they receive, and is working with the Department to achieve this. We anticipate some helpful cost shifting: Medicaid has indicated it will pay for developmental specialists beginning 7/1/09; and payment for therapy assistants should begin in January. The system cost to support children on the autism spectrum currently is \$12.5 million; insurance reimbursement would be a huge relief to the system.

6. Member Updates: Joanne Sweeney announced that the MEIC Annual Conference will be held May 5 and 6, 2009. Applications for exhibitors and sponsors will be held open until all spaces are filled. **Ron Benham** – in Neal Michaels’ absence – reported that a Memo of Understanding between the Department of Children and Families and DPH will be finalized soon, and that both agencies are already implementing most of its provisions. **Amy Young** thanked everyone for all their support and dedication during her term as co-chair of the ICC. She has been involved with the ICC for seven years, and has decided it’s time to move on.

7. Adjournment: The ICC meeting adjourned at 12:00 noon.

