

MINUTES

March 8, 2007

Worcester, Massachusetts

Members Present: Zulmira Allcock, Pat Cameron, Darleen Corbett, Peggy Freedman, Jen Greco, Jack Harris, Margaret Mahoney, Neal Michaels, Anita Moeller, Judith Nest-Pasierb, Kimber O’Connell, Kathy Patisteas, Nancy Phillips, Kathy Rose, Ronna Schaffer, Pam Wildnauer, Joanne Williams, Amy Young.

Members Absent: Robin Adair, Richard Breault, Sandra Daly, Pam Kuechler, Julie Leahy, Karen Lifter, Mary Lutz, Ann Marsh, Sarah Miranda, Therese Murphy-Miller, Stanley Potrude, Barbara Prindle-Eaton, Ronna Schaffer, Tanya Wheeler.

Non-Voting Committee Chairs in Attendance: Margaret Mahoney, Tom Miller, Alden Wood, Peter Woodbury.

1. Welcome: Co-Chairperson Amy Young welcomed the group.

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes of the ICC meeting held January 11, 2007, were approved as written.

2. Director’s Report – Ron Benham:

Part C Budget: Ron distributed a draft of the proposed Part C Budget to be submitted with the Department’s 21st Year Part C Application to OSEP, the federal Office of Special Education Programs. He explained that this is a draft because the final grant award may reflect a decrease in the Massachusetts allocation. The decrease in births in Massachusetts, especially when compared to most other parts of the country, could translate into a decrease of about \$200,000. The budget reflects increases due to collective bargaining in the personnel line; there are no position changes in the budget.

Parent Participation Fees: The 21st Year Application contains discussion of parent participation fees. There were 150 attendees at the Part C Public Hearing held in December, 2007. No one was in favor of increasing fees; however, no alternative solutions were proposed. The Department recently received approval from OSEP for its proposal to add two higher fees to the existing fee schedule. In February, a Program Director who is a Board member of the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium (MEIC) submitted a thorough and thoughtful paper, recommending moving back to the Department’s original proposal to raise all fees by the same percentage across the board. Prior to the hearing, Administration and Finance had already rejected that proposal. A legal opinion from DPH counsel indicates that reverting to that earlier proposal represents a substantive change and would therefore require holding another public hearing. DPH has asked the Secretary of EOHHS to make a determination. Because there is a \$325,000 deficit to be covered this spring, it seems urgent to have a decision soon; the potential

financial yield in the current fiscal year grows smaller as time passes. Programs will be surveyed regarding fees collected in FY 06 and the first half of FY 07. MEIC and the ICC Fiscal Committee have both recommended this be done to determine whether or not some programs have actually collected more than the amount of their assessment. As of now, the Department intends to maintain – in FY 08 – whatever fee schedule ends up being in use for the remainder of FY 07. The system has experienced 4.5% growth in numbers of children served in general EI in FY 07, compared to projected growth of 2.5%, while units of service per child have been stable. The Governor’s very good budget request for a \$3.8M increase for EI for FY 08 still does not adequately cover growth. Vigorous advocacy in the House and Senate will be needed.

Discussion: The following points were raised or clarified in discussion:

- Regarding families who refuse to pay fees: There will be a uniform process for considering family requests to waive fees. Hardship will be considered case-by-case; otherwise, families will be expected to pay in order to receive service.
- Agencies that service a disproportionate number of higher income families – if they refuse to pay fees – may experience financial hardship. A process will be needed for adjusting a program’s fee assessment if a family refuses payment after an IFSP was written – provided there was a good faith effort to collect the fee.
- The Department is very aware that the fee policy could impact children who badly need service, but it is equally important to assure that programs can be paid for services they deliver.

3. Presentation: Pregnancy and Early Life Longitudinal (PELL) Data System – Karen Clements, Department of Public Health: Karen distributed two handouts: *EI Program Evaluation Using the Pregnancy to Early Life Longitudinal Data System*, and Data Brief No. 1, September 2006, *Referral to and Participation in Massachusetts Early Intervention Among Children Born January 1998 to September 2000*. Karen explained that PELL links a broad range of population-based public health data from many sources. Confidentiality is appropriately preserved, and yet many variables can be explored. For example, the rate of multiple births has increased; will this mean rising costs for services? The data currently includes all births, not just children referred to EI; it would be useful to re-run the cost data using only EI clients. Karen also briefly reviewed data regarding children with autism spectrum diagnoses, pointing out that incidence per 10,000 births rises as maternal age rises, and that incidence – or at least earlier detection – appears to be higher in the metro-west and northeast regions. One problem with following children longitudinally over three years is that data will always appear to be outdated. For example, data for births in 2003 will only become available later in 2007 because those children have just recently turned three. People interested in accessing PELL data and related journal articles can contact Patti Fougere at the Department for assistance.

4. Presentation: Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Human Services Portal, Early Intervention – Jack Stewart: Jack distributed a handout. The original portal, launched in May, 2001, “...providing the public easy and comprehensive access to a wide array of government services saving citizens valuable time and allowing state government to do more with less.” Initially, the Department of Public Health was not included because it was too big and complex for the initial launch. Early Intervention and other programs of the Division for Perinatal, Early Childhood and Special Health Needs were “migrated” in January, 2007, meaning

the contents are now displayed through the portal. Content is organized to be useful for consumers, providers, researchers and government. There are agency Landing Pages as well as DPH Center, Division and Program pages. Routine information updates can be accomplished within 48 hours; questions about adding or editing information can be routed through Patti Fougere.

5. Presentation: Lisa Kynvi – Hausslein Award Recipient: Lisa, whose son is blind, is an experienced music therapist who helped create a “Music to Grow By” parent-child group at Perkins School for the Blind. Goals are to help families make music together by providing information, tools and parent support. A small group of families were trained, who then went back to pass on what they had learned. Lisa Glidden, a music therapist from Step One Early Intervention, was hired to run a 30-minute parent-child group and a two-hour parent training. Michelle authored *Music and Your Child*, which is organized like an IFSP. To broaden the scope of “pass it on,” a DVD was produced and new instruments that would pique the interest level of children and parents were purchased. Three universities that have music therapy programs also donated time and materials. A handout is available on request via Darla Gundler. Some wonderful things are accomplished with these very small Hausslein Parent Leadership Awards

6. Committee Reports

- **Standards Committee – Alden Wood:** Alden distributed *Early Intervention Billing Guidelines for Staff*, a one-page cheat sheet designed to help direct service and billing staff quickly answer common billing questions in a consistent way. An FAQ containing more detail will be completed this summer.
- **Personnel Preparation Committee – Margaret Mahoney:** The committee continues its collaboration with representatives of higher education. Other current tasks include revising the committee’s Three-Year Strategic Plan to better reflect the personnel development issues that were a focus of discussion at the ICC Retreat held last fall.
- **Program Planning – Joanne Williams:** The committee is reviewing input from surveys on social-emotional development and expressed needs of programs regarding resources and training. Out of 61 EI programs, 32 returned their surveys. The committee hopes to present some information at a future ICC meeting.
- **Specialty Services Committee – Tom Miller:** Tom reviewed the content of a new informational brochure, *Starting Points for Service Coordinators for Children with Vision Loss*. Tracy Osbahr will distribute it electronically to programs and it will be posted on the EIPLP and EOHHS websites. Some funds are now available to translate public service brochures into Spanish. The committee also plans to update materials on deafness because an increasing number of children with hearing problems are being identified at birth. Transition for these children at age three is especially difficult for many of their families. The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is looking at the incidence of deafness in children with multiple disabilities. There will be a training on CVI – Cortical Visual Impairment – at Perkins School for the Blind on May 30-31, 2007. A conference flyer was distributed.
- **Fiscal Committee – Peter Woodbury:** The committee has taken a position regarding parent participation fees, and urges the Department to immediately survey programs about their fee collection experience in all of FY 06 and the first half of FY 07. Anticipating a budget shortfall for FY 08, the committee also recommends that, whatever

the decision is regarding fees in excess of assessments that have been collected in FY 07, the revised fee schedule and methodology remain in place for FY 08. If the current estimate of a \$600,000 - \$800,000 deficit for FY 08 were to hold true, the additional fees collected might cover it. The Department has formed a working group to address issues related to the cost of specialty services; the Fiscal Committee has requested to be part of that group.

- **Membership Committee – Amy Young:** Parent representatives to the ICC are needed for the Northeast, Metro-West and Western Regions. Any family that has participated in EI, whose child is under twelve years of age, may be considered.

7. Updates from members. Amy Young: The Department is distributing surveys to families regarding their experiences with service coordination across all the systems they need to access for their children's care. Four family meetings will also be held. Amy also thanked Ron and the Department for supporting herself and Darla Gundler to attend a strategic planning session of the National Early Intervention Family Alliance. The group eagerly awaits the next national OSEP Conference to be held in December, 2007. **Janet Price** reported on changes in staffing at Education Development Center that affect the Early Intervention Training Center: Philip Printz has left the center, and Janet is now Project Director. Services and supports to programs and individual staff continue uninterrupted. **Peggy Freedman** announced that the annual Legislative Reception of the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council will be held at the State House on March 21, 2007. **Pat Cameron** announced that the Division of Early Education and Care is hosting conferences with similar agendas in Marlboro and Northampton in early April that will bring together EI and local education staff to work on improving the quality of transition information available to programs and families. **Zulmira Allcock** reminded the group of the 28th Annual Conference of the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium to be held May 9-10 in Marlboro, MA.

8. The ICC meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.