

MINUTES

March 9, 2006

Worcester, Massachusetts

Members Present: Robin Adair, Zulmira Allcock, Pat Cameron, Darleen Corbett, Peggy Freedman, Jen Greco, Jack Harris, Julie Leahy, Karin Lifter, Ann Marsh, Sara Miranda, Therese Murphy-Miller, Judith Nest-Pasierb, Kimber O'Connell, Kathy Patisteas, Nancy Phillips, Barbara Prindle-Eaton, Kathy Rose, Ronna Schaffer, Erin Ward, Pam Wildnauer, Joanne Williams, Amy Young.

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

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

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes of the meeting held January 12, 2006, were approved as written.

2. Director's Report – Ron Benham: Ron gave the following updates: Massachusetts has a new Part C federal monitor: David Steele has replaced Jackie Twining-Martin. States are receiving comments on the Annual Part C State Performance Plans they submitted December 1, 2005. States were expected to project where they would be six years from now on certain critical indicators. Massachusetts is already at 99% on some indicators; the projection for improvement might mean moving a fraction of a percentage point in a positive direction. We are out of compliance regarding Transitions, and have one year to come into compliance. Providers should expect this to be a challenging process; we need to design a plan and stick to timelines. Ron explained that he had just returned from a national meeting of the Association of Maternal Child Health Programs with the sense that we need to re-dedicate ourselves to what we care most about at the federal level, and cannot expect increased Part C funding in the next couple of years. The federal allocation of Part C dollars to Massachusetts is driven by our percentage of the total 0-3 population. After taking a 1% reduction across the board, forty states went down an additional 1% - 6%, based on population loss relative to other states. Massachusetts went down 4%. The Part C Coordinators Association has an ad hoc legislative committee which Ron chairs. We cannot anticipate improvement in the allocation formula until the next IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) reauthorization in 2009. To attempt it before then means opening the discussion to other potential changes that may not be desirable.

Discussion of 20th Year Part C Application: *Annual State Application Under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as Amended in 2004, Federal Fiscal Year 2006* was distributed to the group. Ron explained that no one presented testimony at the Public Hearing held February 15, 2006, but written comments were received. The Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium (MEIC) sent comments about declining morale among providers as the reimbursement rate situation becomes more critical. The Department shares this concern and will support the campaign in whatever ways are appropriate to its role as a state agency. The Department also agrees with MEIC comments regarding the reduced amount of reimbursement for initial intake meetings with families and invites dialogue with providers and families about how to improve this situation. The Department is encouraged by the continuing sense of true partnership with the MEIC.

A revised 20th Year Application – Part C Funding – Summary Description of the Use of Funds was distributed. There is a correction in the fringe benefit rate but no other substantive changes. The budget sheet does not display individual salaries, but that is public information if anyone wishes to request it. Ron further explained that IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. However, new Part C Regulations are not expected before winter/spring 2006/2007. Part B Regulations will be completed before work on Part C begins. Meanwhile, every state will receive conditional approval of their 20th Year Application. There could be “additional special conditions” but none are anticipated for Massachusetts. Then we will have until April 30, 2007, to submit any revisions necessary in order to comply with the new Regulations. Ron stated that the Department will wait until the 21st Year Application to submit most of the revisions to our Massachusetts Operational Standards being voted on by the ICC today, allowing time to get acquainted with our new Program Officer.

Vote: It was moved and seconded that the Massachusetts 20th Year IDEA Part C Application be approved as written.

Discussion: In response to Pat Cameron’s question, it was clarified that we are in compliance with current federal 2004 Part C Regulations, and will have until June 30, 2007, to come into compliance with revised Regulations when they are issued.

The ICC voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

3. Early Intervention Training Center Presentation – Philip Printz: A handout, *Early Intervention Training Center, Center for Children and Families, Education Development Center*, was distributed to the group. Philip explained that Education Development Center (EDC) is a new contractor providing training to the Early Intervention system in Massachusetts. Janet Price, Satu Mehta and Donna Dervishian are the other staff working on the project. Philip’s presentation closely followed his slides. Twenty-three trainings for over 533 participants have been held to date. Janet and Satu are leading most of the sessions in order to become well-acquainted with previously-existing content prior to revisions. All sessions have parent co-presenters. Data indicates that two sessions were canceled due to low enrollment and four others had less than 20 participants. Philip affirmed that these particular problems were not due to the registration process. Philip announced that three Shishmanian Fellowships have been awarded to the following EI staff: Lisa Davis and Jessica Paskalis, Cape Ann Early Intervention, and Stacey Keane at Children’s Community EI in Boston. More details about their projects appear on the Training Center website.

Before concluding, Philip distributed correspondence dated March 9 with Mike Leavitt, Secretary, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, and with Ralph Regula, Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives dated February 22, regarding the issue of whether the federal Child Care Bureau would be consolidated into the Office of Family Assistance. Many associations and other advocates are concerned about possible alterations to Head Start if this move were to take place.

4. Presentation at OSEP Conference – Darla Gundler: As a backdrop to Mary Ann Mulligan’s presentation on advocacy for EI in the Massachusetts Legislature, Darla shared an inspirational video that was presented at the recent OSEP (Office of Special Education Programs) Conference in Washington, D.C. Called *Standing on Mountains*, it is from the Tennessee Early Intervention System at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, in honor of Early Childhood Service Providers and the Children and Families they Serve. It was made by an individual from Tennessee using the song, “You

Raise Me Up,” by Josh Groban. There may be an option to change some of the wording and use the video in Massachusetts.

5. MEIC Update on the Workforce Initiative – Mary Ann Mulligan: Three handouts were distributed: Overview of Early Intervention Quality Workforce Initiative, a description of the problem, and the EI FY 07 Budget Request – Protect the Commonwealth’s Investment in EI. Mary Ann reviewed that at the ICC Retreat held in September, 2005, there was discussion of forming a campaign. Advocacy always begins and ends with children, families and staff. Until the last few years, we always assumed the staff would be there. In context, we are just coming out of a serious statewide fiscal crisis during which we focused on keeping the system intact though we did sustain cuts. Now it’s time to “kick it up a notch. The campaign focus is on preserving quality services, protecting the investment already made, and attracting more people into the training pipeline. With a history of 1% rate increases while the Consumer Price Index was rising 3%, the cumulative effect of losses to the system is about 24%. When EI salaries are compared with other settings that use similar staff, there is a 25%-35% discrepancy. Being realistic, the campaign is about achieving an 8% increase each year for three years. An 8% increase in FY 07 means earmarking \$3.78 million for a rate increase directed toward salaries.

Discussion: The following points were made in discussion: EI is a health and developmental service with third party reimbursement; this justifies the fact that Operational Standards require highly credentialed staff. The initiative includes meetings with the Chancellor of Higher Education and others in a position to increase the numbers of students being prepared in the professions EI hires. It is important to engage as many partners as possible, for example, physicians and those in early education and care.

6. Committee Reports. Vote on EI Operational Standards – Alden Wood: Two documents were distributed: *EI Operational Standards – Summary of Key Changes*, and *EIOS Review – Summary of Actions on Feedback Received*. Alden thanked all the people who have spent countless hours on this process. Responses were received from 85 members of the EI community addressing 71 areas of the Standards.

Motion: It was moved and seconded that the Operational Standards as revised be implemented as of July 1, 2006.

Discussion: Standards are necessary in order to provide consistency and accountability across the state regarding EI. The wording is done by the committee following the specific language that exists in state and federal law. The introduction to the standards contains the accepted definition of EI in Massachusetts. The Standards Committee is a standing committee of the ICC. Therefore it will continue to work on any sections of the standards that require further clarification, for example, the difference between “clinical opinion” and “clinical judgment.” The Department can also research a topic and provide additional policy or guidance as necessary, and standards can be revised again in the future.

Vote: The ICC voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Personnel Preparation Committee – Margaret Mahoney: The recruitment brochure developed last year has been redistributed to colleges; providers can print it directly from a PDF received a year ago. Some committee members have joined the Quality Workforce Initiative; together they are collecting information prior to meetings with state colleges that prepare allied health and other EI professionals.

Program Planning Committee – Erin Ward: The committee was charged to look at program practices regarding assessment and treatment of social-emotional development in order to define tangible approaches that can be embedded in what EI already does. Another charge is to define best practices in regard to transition from EI to next step programs and services. *Continuing the Journey* is being revised. A third charge is to explore definitions and practices regarding community screening, and to open a conversation with the Department of Early Education and Care. This is necessary in order to find ways to work together now that screening in child care is no longer billable in the EI system unless a parent is present and a full EI intake is done.

Specialty Services Committee – Tracy Osbahr for Tom Miller: *Massachusetts Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program – 2004 Annual Report* was distributed. This Massachusetts program has become a nationwide model. We lose 10% of babies to follow-up after initial identification, but nationwide this figure is over 40%. The committee has reviewed its Strategic Plan. An effort is under way to offer more training. The Red Flags training – Signs and Symptoms of Low Incidence Conditions is being offered in collaboration with the EI Training Center.

Fiscal Committee – Peter Woodbury: In July, Jo-Ann Otlin will become the Co-Chair of this committee. Peter reviewed the status of claims payments to EI providers. FY 04 is complete with the exception of Blue Cross Blue Shield claims. FY 05 claims are due by March 10, except that Blue Cross claims are due May 10. FY 06 expenses are currently running close to budget and programs are submitting claims in a more timely fashion. The Insurance Coding Group is working to establish service codes that will create uniform EI service definitions nationwide; that will resolve the problems providers have with insurance companies that operate from outside Massachusetts.

7. Member Updates: Dawn Lapointe announced that brochures are available for the MEIC Conference to be held May 10-11 in Marlboro, MA. Darla Gundler is eager to receive the names of parents who want to come; her goal is to have at least one parent from every program.

8. Celebration for Katharine Thomas. Katharine left her position at DPH in January, after five years as Director of Policy and Planning responsible for EI and other early childhood programs. Several people spoke about Katharine's work. Amy Young said she especially appreciated how Katharine always ensured that parents were included at every level in every decision. Ron Benham commented that Katharine leaves enormous shoes to fill. Barbara Prindle-Eaton commented on the way in which Katharine kept the ICC central in her work – a place to brainstorm and seek guidance that doesn't happen in other states. Her tenure paralleled five important transitional years in EI in Massachusetts, remaining on a clear track while responding to funding constraints and changing federal regulations. Katharine then spoke as "just me for a minute." She reflected on the struggle that transition requires and thanked the group for the opportunity to be involved in this work in an atmosphere of collaboration. She publicly acknowledged three people: Ron Benham, for facilitating, leading and building a system from the ground up; Barbara Prindle-Eaton for working collaboratively through the ICC to build consensus; and Patti Fougere for "everything that works on the ground."

The ICC meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.