

MINUTES

January 8, 2009 – Marlboro, Massachusetts

Members Present: Jennifer Amaya-Thompson, Kristin Britton, Pat Cameron, Darleen Corbett, Kelly Ann Coyne, Jen Greco, Jack Harris, Karin Lifter, Margaret Mahoney, Neal Michaels, Sara Miranda, Kimber O’Connell, Jennifer O’Leary, Nancy Phillips, Kathie Rose, Ronna Schaffer, Joanne Sweeney, Joanne Williams.

Members Absent: Robin Adair, Lois Aldrich, Richard Breault, Sandra Daly, Jen DerBegosian, Pam Kuechler, Peggy Lee, Anne Marsh, Therese Murphy-Miller, Nancy Schwartz, Arlene Tannenbaum, Pam Wildnauer.

Non-Voting Committee Chairs in Attendance: Rena Ginsberg, Tom Miller, Peter Woodbury.

1. Welcome: Tri-Chairperson Margaret Mahoney welcomed the group, and introduced the two newly-appointed Tri-Chairs: Kimber O’Connell and Joanne Williams. Margaret also circulated a card for Amy Young, who recently stepped down as Co-Chairperson of the ICC. A Certificate of Appreciation and a gift will be sent to Amy in recognition of her partnership and guidance; she will remain very active in the disability community. Margaret announced that the document, *Partnering for the Success of Children with Hearing Loss*, which was scheduled to be voted on today is instead being sent back to Steering Committee. She also announced that, in an effort to increase efficiency, email will be used for most ICC communications, and members who wish to continue receiving hard copy should contact Darla Gundler to make arrangements. The Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium will be sending legislative advocacy alerts regarding federal and state EI funding to Darla, who will forward them to ICC members.

Approval of Minutes: The Minutes of the ICC meeting held November 13, 2008, were approved with this correction: Margaret Mahoney was not present.

2. Director’s Report – Ron Benham: Ron gave several updates. A second round of 9-C cuts will be announced soon. The Governor has legislative authority to make these cuts that will directly affect Early Intervention. House One – the Governor’s 2010 budget proposal – will be released later in January. We anticipate some very challenging decisions that will affect children and families. At DPH, there will be a state hiring freeze and other measures such as furloughs, some layoffs and subsequent “bumping” in the seniority chain will be implemented. President Elect Obama and his Transition Team have made some encouraging statements about funding for programs for young children including EI, disability services, and full funding for IDEA. However, some decisions about state funding for EI must be made before we know how the economic stimulus will play itself out. One other possibility is that the Federal Financial Participation formula (now FMAP) might be changed so that, whereas we now receive back 50 cents for each state dollar spent, that figure might increase at least temporarily. That could represent a substantial boost to the state because Medicaid is a high-ticket budget item. As of July 1, 2009, MassHealth will assume reimbursement costs for Developmental Specialists.

Ron commented on the recent national OSEP – Office of Special Education Programs – conference, at which Massachusetts was well and ably represented. There was good dialogue and the atmosphere felt more helpful than in some prior years.

3. Presentation – 2008 OSEP National Early Childhood Conference Update: Margaret Mahoney noted that our voices have been heard by the Obama Transition Team, and that Massachusetts had at least ten representatives at the OSEP Conference. It is wonderful to see how respected we are, and to be in dialogue with federal personnel. Margaret described a workshop on personnel development in which the role of EI was acknowledged by occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology professions. Kimber O’Connell commented on sessions regarding children on the autism spectrum. There is growing momentum to make autism a medical diagnosis and to institute insurance coverage for appropriate treatment; and emerging consensus that children who receive intensive services before age three ultimately have the best outcomes. Joanne Williams noted how valuable it is when parents come together. She appreciated seeing how well-respected our state is when compared to many others. Pat Cameron also commented on how proud we can be – many of the solicited presentations were by people from Massachusetts. Karin Lifter expressed her concern that programs preparing allied health professionals describe themselves as preparing generalists but do not consistently include competency in early childhood in their graduation requirements. Karin also reported on her own presentation: She gave a session on play as the sixth developmental domain, and was encouraged

because the audience stated they would like to see this material become part of regular curriculum. **Darla Gundler** reported on the Early Intervention Family Alliance Board meeting held during the conference, and EIFA's First Annual membership meeting which had about 30 attendees. Families created their own paper which was submitted to the Obama Transition Team. It will be on the EIPLP website and will be sent to about 25 partner organizations.

4. Votes: In the absence of a quorum, the decision was made to do a full electronic mail vote on the Certified Early Intervention Competency Indicators.

5. Committee Reports: Fiscal Committee – Peter Woodbury: Peter briefly reviewed items the committee has recently discussed. The hoped-for increase in EI reimbursement rates is no longer on the table, even though the Department has heartily supported the effort. As reported previously, the committee continues to focus on ways to rebalance the payment system. These include transferring payment responsibility for Developmental Specialists to Medicaid; pending legislation requiring insurance to pay for autism services; and achieving “first dollar coverage” for the co-pays and deductibles that the Department now pays for out state appropriation. **Specialty Services – Tom Miller:** A document has been written regarding the needs of children with low vision. Service providers are being encouraged to involve each child's specialty service providers in the assessment and transition process. Tom reviewed the recent Autism Forum; Tracy Osbahr will send the PowerPoint materials to ICC members. A spring forum is being discussed along with the possibility of setting up a web mechanism for communications within the specialty service provider community. Transition planning sheets have been created to help teams decide what learning and media assessments are appropriate for each individual child. A new publication, *Deaf-Blind Service Guidelines*, has been accepted by the Association of SPED Directors; it gives families more backing regarding securing appropriate services for their children. **Personnel Preparation Committee – Rena Ginsburg:** The committee has been discussing integration of some of the new competency indicators into higher education curricula. Work has begun on the periodic review of the CSPD – the required Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. **Program Planning Committee – Joanne Williams:** The committee is now focusing on supporting the implementation of its recently-completed Vision Statement and Recommendations. It is also discussing the impact on families of recent eligibility changes, and is preparing materials that may be useful to families who no longer qualify for EI services. **Standards Committee – Zulmira Allcock:** There are currently no updates; the committee will meet in March.

6. Member Updates. Pat Cameron: Pat reported that the **Department of Early Education and Care** has been seriously affected by 9-C budget cuts. Vouchers and flexible funds were frozen, and Mass Family Network and Community Partnerships for Children expansion grants were suspended. There is a hiring freeze and the Department is working to reassign staff to critical areas. The new Commissioner, Dr. Sherri Killins, who comes to the Department from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has a background in nursing and counseling. The *Family Support Guide* has been released. It is a nice companion to the Transition Guide, and is available on line in English, Spanish and Portuguese. **Neal Michaels** reported for the **Department of Children and Families**. The new interagency policy is now in place; it requires referral to EI of children under three in families in which reports of abuse or neglect have been substantiated. Some offices were already implementing the policy; for others there will be a considerable increase in referrals to EI. Children who are almost three will be referred and families will be informed about how these late referrals might be handled. Conversations will be facilitated in an effort to plan together what is best for each individual situation. Area Office personnel should already be meeting with their local EI programs; however, since there are 29 Area Offices, procedures may vary until everyone gains experience with the new policy. DCF staff members are being encouraged to attach the signed family release of information to the EI referral form. Patti Fougere commented that DCF and DPH are working together to create an on line transition planner. **Sara Miranda** reported that the **Federation for Children with Special Needs** will hold its annual conference on March 14. There is information at www.fcsn.org. **Joanne Sweeney** reported that the annual conference of the **Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium** is being held May 6 and May 7. For information: www.maeic.org.

7. The ICC meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m. Members were invited to stay to view the video, *Including Samuel*, which documents the experiences of a boy with significant special needs in a Cambridge public elementary school.