



Friday, September 20, 2024
Meeting Minutes

Public Meeting 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
ZOOM Meeting Platform

A regular public meeting of the New Jersey State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) was held on Friday, September 20, 2024. The meeting was held via ZOOM meeting platform. The meeting was called to order at approximately 9:30 a.m. by Joyce Salzberg, Acting Chair.

Welcome

- I. Joyce Salzberg welcomed attendees and read the Welcome Statement.

Attendance

- I. Maintained by the Department of Health (DOH)

Introductions

- I. SICC members and DOH representatives were introduced.
- II. Quorum requirements were met.
- III. Public members signed their attendance through the chat box in the ZOOM platform.

Approval of Minutes

- I. The June 14, 2024 Minutes were *APPROVED*; 8 Yes, no opposed, 1 abstain, 4 not present, no discussion. Motion by Catherine Colucci, seconded by Virginia Lynn.

SICC Member Updates

- I. Nicole Edwards shared that the Division for Early Childhood updated their vision and mission statement. Ms. Edwards will share the link at a later date.
- II. Susan Evans shared that Jennifer Blanchette McConnell and Kristen Kugelman will be doing a learning opportunity with the New Jersey American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) presenting to pediatricians on October first. Shared the flyer in the chat.

SICC Standing & Ad Hoc Committees Reports

- I. **Administrative/Policy Committee**, vacant chair
 - A. Samuel Kivell volunteered to Chair this committee and Saira Hussain Akhter volunteered to be part of the Committee.

II. **Service Delivery Committee**, Virginia Lynn, Chair

A. Virginia Lynn shared a power point.

Ms. Lynn shared the Committee was tasked with documenting and detailing the description of good quality Early Intervention (EI) services in childcare.

The Committee broke this down into three components;

1. Service Coordinators set the stage,
2. Agency expectations after assignment, and
3. Practitioners guide for childcare services.

There is a guidance document in DRAFT for each component that will be shared at a later date.

The Committee will continue to fine-tune and finalize the guidance documents, look for more guidance on unique rules and regulations in childcare centers, and share supplemental tools including a specific consent for childcare. Members discussed how EI can do the best we can, but need to keep in mind childcares have their own rules and regulations. Nicole Edwards added to keep in mind the perceptions and expectations of the childcares. Discussion emphasizing it's Federal Law that IDEA services are delivered. Corinne Catalano offered to find where this is written. Ms. Catalano added that some childcares are involved in Grow New Jersey Kids and the Pyramid Strategy.

III. **Fiscal Infrastructure Committee**, Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen, Chair

A. Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen shared the Committee met with Public Consulting Group (PCG) and Early Intervention (EI) Leadership to discuss increasing the Medicaid rates in EI. Medicaid is around \$80 million dollars out of the over \$200 million dollar budget.

- i. Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen stated that 34% of children in EI are in Medicaid. There are 2 ways that PCG bills for Medicaid; 1. The child's Medicaid information is uploaded and sent to the state for reimbursement, and 2. PCG does a sweep of all other children in the system to determine if anyone has been missed. There are additional revenues that are able to be captured in this matter. At times, families become no longer eligible for Medicaid.
- ii. Dr. Thomas Lind stated the Federal Government required Medicaid to do a process called unwinding. People remained on Medicaid throughout the pandemic, even though their eligibility lapsed or they had moved into the no longer eligible category. There were issues that occurred with responsiveness. Dr. Lind requests if anyone knows of this occurring, please call Medicaid.
- iii. Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen stated several other meetings occurred with the proper contacts at Medicaid who are involved in the EI billing process. This helped the Committee understand the process needed to go through in order to have a rate increase.
- iv. Samuel Kivell asked if the Service Coordinators (SC) could check in on the families Medicaid status at the annual meeting. Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen clarified that service coordinators are not responsible for navigating the Medicaid paperwork for families, but can remind the families to maintain their Medicaid eligibility if they do have it.
DOH will look into Mr. Kivell's request to see if it is in writing for the SC to remind the families about Medicaid.
Joyce Salzberg (38:04) mentioned there are many SCs in the chatbox saying they do not know if a Family has Medicaid. Mr. Kivell asked if/what PCG is paid for the Medicaid process and if the rate can be reduced.

- B. COLA Survey - Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen had been asked by Josephine Shenouda to send out a survey to providers regarding what kind of increase has been provided to the staff in association with the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). Received 24 responses. 52% did not give practitioners any increase. 48% gave either a merit or a COLA in 2024. Most providers gave one raise ranging from 1.5% to 5%. Many gave raises to permanent team members, not per diem staff. One agency gave a one-time stipend at a holiday time.
- C. Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTA) Survey – Discussion on rate recommendation for the use of a COTA. The Committee is not sure whether the use of a COTA is the most feasible due to many licensures and supervisory requirements. The Committee decided to take a survey of the providers to ensure their information was current. Received 2 responses. The Committee recommends the state does not move forward with the use of a COTA for a reimbursement rate, noting the Committee cannot speak for whether or not agencies use that in their own way.
- D. Alternative Funding Sources – Ms. Shenouda asked the Committee to look into their use of professional development funding. The Committee is in the process of connecting with other states such as Connecticut and Texas.

IV. **Personnel Preparation Committee**, Corinne Catalano, Chair

- A. Corrine Catalano shared a power point.

Ms. Catalano shared the Committee was requested to provide recommendations on revisions to the Personnel Standards. The Committee is reviewing information from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) Personnel Component with particular attention to subcomponent 2 and the draft ECTA Personnel Standard Self-Assessment Tool. The Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) released a position statement on the Role of Special Instruction in Early Intervention in September 2024.

V. **Family Support Committee**, Nicole Edwards, Chair

- A. Ms. Edwards shared the Committee is now two separate Committees; the Family Support Committee and the Transition Committee. She will Chair the Family Support Committee.
- B. Doctor Survey – In the process of converting the doctor items to a survey that can be disseminated to New Jersey Pediatricians.
- C. Nicole Edwards put in the chat box (starting at 1:30:33) SICC’s Family Support Committee requests new members from WIC, DCP&P, childcare, another healthcare provider. Email edwardsn@rowan.edu.
- D. Ms. Edwards put in the chat box (1:35:50) Parents currently in NJEI – please join an informal conversation with NJ SICC’s Family Support Committee (initial referral experience and why you called EI) Tuesday, November 12, 2024 12pm-1pm. Email Nicole at edwardsn@rowan.edu to get the direct zoom link. Saira Hussain Akhter suggested having a second session after work hours for some families who may not be able to attend the afternoon meeting and to possibly use the Regional Early Intervention Collaboratives (REICs) to disseminate this invite. Discussion continued regarding creating posters, pediatricians’ offices may have a screen to announce meetings, using social media, and translation availability.

Ms. Edwards stated that this initial meeting will help drill down the needs for future meetings.

VI. **Transition Committee**, vacant Chair
In process of organizing

Regional Early Intervention Collaborative (REIC) Update

I. The Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Coordinators, Jennifer Blanchette-McConnell, Nicole Ramirez, Stephanie Flamini, and Nichole Gooding, shared a power point.

- Congratulations to Stephanie Flamini for passing her BCBA certification test.

A. Task - Enhance implementation of evidence-based practices to support the workforce to support families and their infants/toddlers.

i. Offering Regional-Monthly Meet and Greet Sessions.

ii. Each region has its own Community Impression Plan; Helpful Hands – Supporting teaming & collaboration strategies, Family Link – Regional community of practice, Mid-Jersey CARES – Regional reflective supervision/consultation, and South – Regional educational training/workshops.

iii. Reflective Supervision/Consultation (RSC) Community of Practice. DOH paid for 75 Administrators to receive this training.

The purpose- Supports Lead Agency initiative-trained Personnel Development (PD) Champions in the provision of Reflective Supervision Consultation by NJ Association for Infant Mental Health and to support ongoing implementation of RSC. Community of Practice meets quarterly then sends a meeting summary.

iv. Discussion on making this a formal presentation. Some SICC Members expressed what a wonderful presentation this is. Samuel Kivell asked how this work is funded. Jennifer McConnell answered that there is no extra funding. It is part of the position.

Lead Agency Report, Susan Evans, Part C Coordinator

Susan Evans shared a power point.

I. Federal Updates

A. NJEIS Determination was Needs Assistance. New Jersey has required actions related to Indicator 1: Timely Services, Indicator 4: Family Outcomes, Indicator 7: 45 Days, and Indicator 8b and 8c: Transition.

The primary impact for being in the Needs Assistance is that those requirements that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has provided as follow up activities need to be done at the Department. There is no fiscal impact and no monitoring involved at this point.

Corinne Catalano Mentioned that Part B is shifting to using the same Child Outcome Summaries that we see in Early Intervention. Ms. Catalano stated she is on a task force with the 619 Coordinator.

II. State Updates

A. SAVE THE DATE: Early Intervention Providers/Department of Health (EIP/DOH) meeting will be held October 16th via Zoom.

B. Transition in Progress: Passaic Service Coordination Unit (SCU). Catholic Family & Community Services (CFCS) Notified the DOH in June that this would be their last SCU grant application. A Request for Proposal (RFP) process over the Summer resulted in Youth Consultation Services (YCS) being awarded the grant to assume the SCU for Passaic County.

The transition process is in its very early stages and CFCS continues to have all SCU responsibilities until all components of transition can be completed.

DOH does have some information related to why CFCS made this decision and will share at a later date.

Families will be notified once that step in the process is reached.

C. Policy 14: Missed and Cancelled Sessions Policy

- i. NJEIS-14 is out for feedback and comments from parents.
- ii. The drafted NJEIS-14 includes changes to the current policy such as an update to 14 days from date of service, instead of the current “week,” and a definition of “Chronic Cancellations” for both family and practitioner.

D. Strategic Planning Study

- i. DOH has contracted with the National Institute for Education (NIEER) at Rutgers to conduct an overall analysis.
- ii. NIEER has been tasked with conducting a comprehensive examination of the NJEIS structure including the program’s organizational framework, administrative procedures, service coordination mechanisms, and service provider network.
- iii. The purpose is to identify areas for improvement, streamlining processes, enhancing service delivery and optimizing outcomes for children and families participating in NJEIS.
- iv. This is a 2 year study. NIEER is in the early stages and will be forthcoming through additional meetings and communications.

III. RFI/RFP Update given by Sirisha Vadrevu.

- A. The draft for the request for proposal (RFP) has passed 2 approvals: the Office of Information Technology and the Office of Management and Budget. Currently stands now with the Division of Purchase and Property. The Department is reaching out via email and aims to get the User’s perspective in finalizing the requirements for the data system. More to follow as the process moves along.
There was consideration to building the system in house, but it was decided that it is better as a vendor model.

Procedural Safeguards Office (PSO), Beth Lohne, PSO Coordinator

- A. Six new formal complaints. Two carried over from fiscal year 2024. One was a Due Process Hearing request resolved through a resolution meeting. There is an ongoing system complaint regarding Passaic County SCU.
- B. Held a Mediator Training in June and now have 16 Mediators.
- C. There has been an increase in fraud, waste, and abuse investigations; two presently.
Working on a process to make agencies aware of practitioners with substantiated fraud.
- D. Compensatory Services – New process gives families the option of participating and if they choose to participate, will get an exit evaluation.
179 families participating in the compensatory process last fiscal year. This is a significant decrease in families receiving compensatory services. This year since July, 311 families notified and 52 completed the process as of September 15th.
- E. Office Hours – Held 3 so far. Over 100 people attended.
Topics include Compensatory Services for September and Confidentiality in October.
November will be an open forum.

New Business

- I. Future Meeting Dates:
November 22, 2024

Old Business

- I. Transition Committee chair vacancy. Samuel Kivell suggests asking Erika Nava if there is a way to accelerate the SICC Member applications.
- II. Retreat Discussion - Joyce Salzberg has been in communication with Josephine Shenouda regarding holding the retreat after more positions are appointed to the SICC. Susan Evans added that all of the appointees' paperwork has left the Department. Saira Hussain Akhter expressed it would be useful to have the retreat and to move forward in some items, understanding that best case scenario is to wait for the appointments, but in lieu of the fact that there is not a clear timeline as to when that will occur, it may not be the best course of action to wait for the appointments to occur.
- III. Rate Study Discussion - Erika Nava, proxy for Senator Ruiz, (1:53:20) –
Ms. Nava stated she was tasked at the last meeting to reach out to the DOH in terms of the rate study findings. Ms. Nava stated she was told by a liaison there that due to the vendor not finishing the study, the findings cannot be shared. Ms. Nava stated she was told they cannot use incomplete information to inform them about the rates and are going out to bid to do another study.
Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen's response is summarized below:
Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen stated she was informed by the Assistant Commissioner that the information was never intended to be released. There were several increases to the rates provided over the past 3 years and they were able to support that because of the rate study. They indicated that because of the fact that those increases were provided and those rates were commensurate with other States' rates, they will no longer be considering any further increases to the rates based on the rate study.
Ms. Nava stated she will follow up with the DOH asking for clarification and what is the timeline for the new study and will the results be made public this time.
Samuel Kivell asked about the amount paid for the rate study and if it was incomplete, will there be a refund?
- IV. Inequity of services – Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen mentioned the written public comment submitted last meeting by Lori Schaeffer from Inspira regarding Cumberland County.
Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen suggests that perhaps NIEER can look at Cumberland County in their study.
Saira Hussain Akhter suggests providing meeting minutes and public comments submitted in writing for the past two years to Rutgers for them to potentially use as part of their study and request that practitioner departure issue be addressed in the study.
DOH responded NIEER will have access to what they ask.
Joyce Salzberg stated she noticed that the focus is on Cumberland County, but over the years, the children and families that live in the Southern Region get less services than those that live in the Northern part of the State.
Ms. Salzberg suggests Rutgers could do a follow up study in Part B to see what happens when children transition from Part C to Part B because EI does not get data regarding that.
- V. FLI ability to have additional role - Catherine Colucci would like to look into the Foreign Language Interpreters (FLI) ability to have a second role in the system.
- VI. Practitioners Leaving the System is happening more – Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen.
Nicole Edwards stated there needs to be a way to link their standards to the courses in birth to 5 years old.
- VII. Saira Hussain Akhter requested via email that the Minutes reflect the following:
 - A. Attach all written public comments to the minutes for this meeting and past meetings for at least this year on the website.
 - B. Save presentation materials along with minutes and look into how videos can be made available proactively.
 - C. Save Chat Box Conversation as it has a lot of valuable information / materials.
 - D. Proposed a representative from the collaboratives be added to the SICC.

E. Review the reasons for departure of agencies and SCUs and if there are any underlying issues that are the same - such as St John of God and Passaic SCU.

Susan Evans added that the reasons for these 2 agencies are different because one agency was providing services and one was doing service coordination, however, it is correct procedure and knowledge building to look at some of the core reasons for each agency.

DOH Responded that SICC items are saved and are available to the public. Information from the SICC meeting presentations is used in reporting the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and the Annual Performance Report (APR). All materials are saved at the State.

The presentations and written public comment will now be sent to Members along with the Minutes.

Public Comments

The following comments were made by members of the public:

Kenneth (David) Holmes, ABCD EIPA – Mr. Holmes' statement is summarized below:

Mr. Holmes feels for the whole issue with the Passaic County Service Coordination Unit. I have had several phone calls about the issue and perhaps there should be a discussion at the next meeting and what is the system in place for the Request for Proposal (RFP) should be included in that discussion. Does it include an appeal process? Who is on the review committee? These are things that should be looked at. There should be a strong process in place for when agencies are replaced. A good process should be in writing. Hearing the Strategic Plan, I am all for that and am willing to assist. I look forward to when the Addendum to the Letter of Agreement (LOA) will be addressed. Agencies have been waiting 9 months now. Mr. Holmes stated that an Organization Chart was not received yet. Why were Administrative Staff requested via email to be entered into the Learning Management System (LMS?) Please keep in mind that there is a cost to the Providers when there is a required training.

DOH Response: Administrative Staff need to be active in the LMS because they may be asked to take trainings such as Confidentiality. They also need access because they have the ability to assign trainings to anyone who works for them in the LMS. The Organization Chart was sent to SICC Members.

Saira Hussain Akhter asked if the Organization Chart can be posted on the website.

DOH Response: It is the EI internal staff and is not finalized yet.

Cynthia Newman, Mid-Jersey CARES Director – Ms. Newman thanked the Training and Technical Assistance Coordinators for a nice presentation. We've had a physician outreach project in our region for 4 years, there are over 2,00 names now. We send periodic postcards with who we are, how to make a referral, with a QR code. If families sign a written consent; we send the evaluation report to the physician. Doctors refer other children when they see what a fine job is done.

Lisa O'Connor, Passaic Service Coordination Unit Coordinator – Ms. O'Connor's statement is summarized below:

Ms. O'Connor shared there have been a lot of internal changes. Ms. O'Connor stated it has been extremely stressful this past year working with half a staff with cases over 100. We have been given little to no information about this transition. We have been working tirelessly to service our families in the county because most of my people who are still on board love what they do and our focus is the families and children in Passaic County. Despite our effort, it is no surprise there is a ton of complaints with Procedural Safeguards. How can there not be when we have half a staff. It is hard to address the issues when we do not know them. We are told constantly about the concerns and some we have been able to follow up with, but when I ask for more information, it's not forthcoming. The concern now is the quality of what these families are getting in the county because my staff is burnt and do not

have job security, and then to see our jobs posted on Indeed with another agency. We have no information about when this will end; it could be tomorrow, it could be at the end of the grant. It's becoming very difficult to work every day. I did not know what forum to put this out, so I figured why not here because every effort I have made to get support has fallen on deaf ears. We are trying our best and working as much as we can to meet timelines and make sure things are not missed. I had another worker resign because if your job security is in question, you're going to. I have workers who have been here 10 years, 15 years and they are dedicated to what they do and I want people to know that. Just a little communication and support would go a long way.

Submitted Chat Messages as Public Comments:

Kbalent (2:57:42) - Will the results of this analysis study be public?

Terra Madden (3:09:51) – Are EIPs going to receive a document about the process? An updated document.

If that was the evaluation criteria by OSEP then why are exit evaluations deemed essentially voluntary?

Cynthia Newman (3:17:11) – hi-I may not be able to speak today in public comment – but mid jersey cares reic has had a physician outreach project for 4 years – we have a list we developed of 2,000 physicians and practices in central NJ and periodically send them postcards about ei with qr codes – we also with family written permission send md child's EI eval. This has been a very productive process.

Vicky – FRA (3:19:41) – big time loss of practitioners.

Amber Hummer, PGCS (3:20:59) – any updates on a new make-up policy? That would help.

MaryBeth Forbes – (3:21:04) – Things to think about for staff retention: Better pay rate / changing cancellation policy – families cancel and per diem staff lose pay / IFSP meetings and how they are run / agency collaborations. And lets take a look at EIMS.

Terra Madden – (3:24:58) I think a similar pay rate for all EIP's would be helpful. But I realize this cannot be regulated.

MaryBeth Forbes – (3:25:00) – AND lets take a look at EIMS

Vicky – FRA – (3:32:57) can it be put in the LMS?

iPhone – (3:34:20) I'm from Passaic service coordinator unit and I didn't give Ms. O'Connor a permission to speak on my behalf, so I'm not sure why she's speaking on behalf of the whole unit.

Sharon Anderson-Servi... (3:34:33) – Hi Mr. Holmes, what is your role in EI?

Carmela Hanna (3:36:28) – thank you Cynthia.

Submitted Written Comments (Attached):

Lisa O'Connor submitted a written comment in addition to her verbal comment during the meeting.

There were no additional public comments.

The Public can submit comments to the Department or in the Chat Box which are recorded for the Department.

The next SICC public meeting is November 22, 2024, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

MOTION to adjourn the meeting by Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen and seconded by Catherine Colucci at approximately 12:50 p.m.