

Friday, November 17, 2023
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, November 17, 2023. 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

- Joyce Salzberg welcomed attendees and read the Welcome Statement.

Attendance

- Maintained by the Department of Health (DOH)

Introductions

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

Approval of Minutes

- The 5/19/2023 Minutes - Motion to accept the Minutes by Catherine Colucci, seconded by Virginia Lynn. *APPROVED* unanimously; no opposition, 2 abstain, no discussion.
- The 9/22/2023 Minutes – Motion to accept the Minutes by Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen, seconded by Corinne Catalano; *APPROVED* unanimously; no opposed, 5 abstain, no discussion.

SICC Member Updates

- Kimberly Peto is retiring and leaving the SICC. Members expressed their thanks for her hard work and dedication to the SICC and the NJEIS overall.
 - Public members also expressed their thanks and congratulations in the Zoom chat.
 - DOH will work on a new appointment for the SICC to fill the Service Coordination representative role.

SICC Standing & Ad Hoc Committees Reports

- **Administrative/Policy Committee**, vacant chair
 - No report given.
 - A chairperson is needed for this Committee.

- **Service Delivery Committee**, Virginia Lynn, Chair
 - The Committee distributed the updated *New Jersey Early Intervention Primer* to Council Members prior to the meeting. This document recommends components for onboarding new practitioners.
 - The Committee's next steps will focus on Early Intervention services in childcare.

- **Fiscal Infrastructure Committee**, Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen, Chair
 - The Committee has been working with the EIMS (Early Intervention Management System) reports. The Committee will be using a small provider agency group to work with DOH to identify the issues that providers are having with certain reports and steps that can be taken to clarify the reports' purposes.
 - A NJEIS Dashboard which contains the reports usage in detail will be distributed soon from DOH
 - Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen is asking for any Service Coordination representatives who would like to contribute to a conversation regarding the EIMS reports directed toward Service Coordination.
 - The Committee requests the results of the PCG rate study completed in 2023 to be released.

MOTION: The Committee recommends the SICC send a formal letter to the Commissioner of Health requesting the results of the rate study.

Motioned by Catherine Colucci, seconded by Michele Christopoulos.

DISCUSSION: No further discussion.

APPROVED: 9 approved, no opposed.

- The Committee continues to research implementing insurance as an additional revenue source.
 - The Committee asked if there are any updates on identifying the process to increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates for Early Intervention (EI) services.
 - Thomas Lind had no updates, but requested a list of codes that the committee feels are being reimbursed sub-optimally as a beginning point of the process.
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- **Personnel Preparation Committee**, Corinne Catalano, Chair
 - Corinne Catalano stated the Committee is at a pause.
 - The Committee is looking for guidance on their next steps.
 - Joyce Salzberg asked about the Guidance documents being created for the discipline specific roles.
 - Corinne Catalano clarified that the Personnel Standards are clearer regarding the licensed roles.

- Brandy Acolia and Susan Evans clarified those sections of the document, such as the experience area could be used for other roles as the agency deems appropriate.
 - Susan Evans stated the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEPs) has indicated that States should not lower their personnel standards because of a struggle to find practitioners.
- **Family Support & Transition Committee, Nicole Edwards, Chair**
 - The Committee has 2 sub-Committees: one working with birth to one referral rates and the other working on transition.
 - One sub-committee is in the process of finalizing a survey for physicians about their knowledge of making referrals.
 - The other sub-committee is focusing on how to ensure smooth transitions.
 - The Committee is looking into the strengths and areas of recommendation for Early Intervention websites; Regional Early Intervention Collaborative (REIC) and State websites specifically.

Regional Early Intervention Collaborative (REIC) Update

- No updates

Lead Agency Report, Susan Evans, Part C Coordinator

Susan Evans shared a power point with information from the DOH.

- A. The DOH thanks Kimberly Peto, for 28 years of service to the NJEIS.
- B. FEDERAL UPDATES

Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS)

- The DOH received notification on October 6, 2023, that NJ Part C has been assigned to the next cohort of states to undergo Federal Differentiated Monitoring (DMS).
- New Jersey has been assigned to DMS Cohort 4 and will be assigned an engagement month between August 2026 through January 2027.
- OSEP will contact New Jersey in October 2024 to schedule the engagement visit month and will discuss DMS in more detail and provide specific timing for the discovery and engagement monitoring activities.
- OSEP's DMS monitoring is designed to provide differentiated levels and types of support based on each State's unique strengths, progress, and challenges.
- DMS monitoring will include a review of aspects of eight key components required to improve results for children with disabilities and will focus on the State's general supervision system.
- There are 3 phases to the DMS process, including Discovery, Engagement, and Close-out.

Federal Reporting

- Dispute Resolution Data was submitted on November 15, 2023.
- Annual Performance Plan (APR) is due February 1, 2024.
- At the January 2024 SICC meeting, the DOH will present the APR for the SICC' review and approval.

State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) Update

- Susan Evans presented the Welcome to NJEIS video that was recently created.
- Kristen Kugelman presented updates on the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) which will be submitted with the APR in February 2024.
- The theory of Action which outlines the goals and objectives of the SSIP through 4 specific work strands was reviewed for the Council
- *Infrastructure Strand:* A major success in 2023 was the building and release of a centralized Learning Management System (LMS) to support the professional development of NJEIS personnel.
- Outcomes of the LMS initiative through November 2023 are:
 - Over 6,400 licenses were issued to the workforce.
 - Onboarding time for new hires reduced by 50%
 - Automatic enrollment in the Procedural Safeguards Modules, Welcome to EI, and Introduction to the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) Development asynchronous learning modules on new hires plan page.
 - Real time analytics for Professional Development (PD) Champions and DOH.
- *Communication and Messaging Strand:* Early Relational Health (ERH) messaging was accomplished through the creation of a new EIS video for families, updates to NJEIS associated websites, REIC marketing materials and regional meetings with providers and other stakeholders.
- *Service Coordination Strand:* Work continued implementation of the Routines-Based Model in the NJEIS. Service Coordinators infused the process of ECO-Mapping into their Family Directed Assessment processes, and the team of RBI endorsed Service Coordinators maintained their work with the national RBI team.
- *Workforce Development and Support Strand:* NJEIS utilized the American Rescue Plan funds to provide significant professional development opportunities across the system to practitioners, administrators, service coordinators and families.
 - All professional development related to the evidence-based practices of Pyramid Model, RBI, Reflective supervision and consultation and the DEC recommended practices.
 - Professional Development Champion teams created in provider agencies and service coordination.
- American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funds \$1,098,000 in SSIP activities were expended as:
 - Learning Management System build and initial release = \$98,000
 - Partnership with Montclair State University for professional development and training (multi-year plan) = \$750,000
 - NJ Association of Infant Mental Health (NJAIMH) = \$30,000
 - Updated and enhanced asynchronous learning modules = \$135,000
 - Practitioner stipends for professional development = \$85,000
- Stakeholders invited to join a virtual meeting Friday, December 8, 2023 10:00am to 11:30am to discuss next steps and possible changes to the SSIP.

C. STATE UPDATES:

DOH priorities for 2024

- Activities and priorities for 2024 are focused on assuring the NJEIS is modern, efficient, effective, and sustainable.
- EI will be adding the “Connect” feature to EIMS. This will allow for better access to send and receive documents from families.
- DOH is looking to update the Service Encounter Verification Log (SEVL) process with the help of a small stakeholder group to be formed in early 2024.
- There will be a review of “cancellation” data for patterns and root causes
- Creating operational updates for completing the Family Cost Participation (FCP) process with families.

New Business

- The 2024 Calendar will be discussed during the December 5, 2023, retreat meeting.
- New Letter of Agreements (LOA) were provided to provider agencies in October 2023. The Council had concerns and discussion about the updated LOA and expectations of the DOH.
 - Ms. Salzberg voiced her concern that the LOA is a non-compete, but it mentions the elimination of the distinction between a comprehensive program and a vendor program. She stated that the SICC had recommended in 2017 to eliminate the distinction between a comprehensive program and a vendor program in a recommendation for a Request for Application (RFA), not the LOA.
 - Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen asked where the DOH stands on this concern and why this was proposed.
 - Part C Director Josephine Shenouda stated there is further under discussion at DOH and a Frequently Asked Questions document will be released after today’s meeting. Dr. Shenouda requested everyone read the FAQ and then there will be another discussion.
 - Kimberly Peto questioned why DOH is waiting until after the FAQ comes out rather than clarifying this issue now. Ms. Peto added that the EIP agency designation can create confusion for the Service Coordination Units as well.
 - Virginia Lynn questioned if the misunderstanding is that anyone can pick up a child after the 30 days which would be different from at the beginning of service assignment.
 - Michele Christopoulos expressed concerned as to how this will affect her agency and would have preferred to have all the facts before today’s discussion.

Old Business

- Policy 14 - Family Rescheduling and cancellations guidelines –
 - Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen would like the State to consider looking at the guidelines used for family rescheduling and cancellations.
 - Susan Evans stated the State agrees an analysis of data is needed and has preliminary data collected.
 - Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen added the change in having the flexibility to reschedule within the authorization period to only being able to reschedule within the week that the service was to

occur has led to families losing the total amount of services allotted for that authorization period because some cannot be made up for numerous reasons within the same week. Practitioners cannot count on having reliable income. Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen suggested the solution of changing the requirement to allow the session to be made up within the current authorization period. Ms. Hinnigan-Cohen states there are unintended consequences happening across the board because of this restriction.

- Michele Christopoulos agreed that changes/updated to the policy. Her agency is losing practitioners because of cancellations. The families need to be accountable as well.
- Joyce Salzberg concurred that high cancellations are a factor in the ability to retain staff.

MOTION: Recommend the State relax the requirement for a family rescheduling/cancellation within the one-week service period.

Motioned by Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen, seconded by Michele Christopoulos.

DISCUSSION: No further discussion.

APPROVED: 7 approved, 2 absent, none opposed.

Public Comments

- **The following comments were made by members of the public**

- David Kenneth Holmes, ABCD:
 - The decision of the Doh to eliminate the EIP designations is wrong and will be a detriment to the comprehensive programs.
 - Mr. Holmes suggested the establishment of a quality assurance unit prior to allowing vendors to migrate to comprehensive status as well as monitor the broadcast/assignment process.
 - Mr. Holmes requests that provider organizations maintain the ability to subcontract with other companies.
 - Mr. Holmes recommends postponing the elimination of the designations.
 - Mr. Holmes thanked Kimberly Peto and wished her the best.
- Carmela Hanna, Sunny Days:
 - Ms. Hanna congratulated Kimberly Peto.
 - Ms. Hanna thanked the Department for their hard work bringing EI into the evidence-based realm.
 - Ms. Hanna questioned what the definition of 'effort' in the Rider C. is
- Patty Carlesimo, LADACIN Network:
 - Ms. Carlesimo thanked the Department for supporting the system.
 - Ms. Carlesimo expressed concern that some of the long-term agencies may not be able to sustain the elimination of comprehensive and vendor designation.
- Dina Mensch, Therapy Associates:
 - Ms. Mensch stated Therapy Associates is a comprehensive in the Northeast region and Essex and focuses mostly on comprehensive responsibilities.
 - Ms. Mensch stated that her agency would lose 50 % of their caseload and want to continue their quality of service.

- Ms. Mensch stated that bringing vendors in after 30 days waiting is what is happening now, therefore, eliminating the designation would not alleviate the No Provider Available (NPA) issue.
 - Marisa Paulsen, Sunny Days:
 - Ms. Paulsen stated that introducing more agencies can have a significant negative impact on the staff already recruited and there is already an issue with retaining staff due to various reasons.
 - Ms. Paulsen expressed concern regarding the restrictive makeup policies.
 - She also congratulated Kimberly Peto on her retirement.
 - Mary Krupp, Progressive Steps:
 - Ms. Krupp congratulated Kimberly Peto and thanked Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen for mentioning the cancellation concern.
 - Progressive Steps is both a comprehensive and vendor agency.
 - Ms. Krupp mentioned she was unsure how eliminating the designation would help remove children from the timely services list quicker.
 - Ms. Krupp would like to see checks and balances in place if the system were to eliminate the designations.
 - Carola D’Emery, Sunny Days:
 - Ms. D’Emery has several questions related to the designation changes. She asked, “What is the reason for this change?” Why are we changing the designations of comprehensive and vendor? And “What does this seek to solve?”
 - Ms. D’Emery commented for a system embracing relationships and trust, the delivery of this process did not pay homage to the effort this system is making.

Submitted Written Comments:

- None submitted

Submitted Chat Messages as Public Comments:

- Many attendees congratulated and thanked Kimberly Peto.
- Cynthia Newman:
 - It’s great that the service delivery committee moving onto childcare and partnership with EI.
- Carola d’Emery:
 - Suggested the committee that will discuss childcare-EI partnerships to secure legal review/counsel, to address the issues of privacy that emerge from working in that environment.
 - Stated practitioners will not want to work in a system where the income can fluctuate so widely. We work because we need to make a living, and if there are other options available to the practitioners, they will leave EI.
- Eileen Masticova:
 - Union County does not use vendors often and the level of children and families’ services will drastically change with the designation changes.

- Amber Hummer:
 - It is detrimental to families, especially those with complex medical needs, to not be eligible for make-up sessions in the following week or later when they are frequently sick or have other medical appointments.
- Edna Lee:
 - Insurance companies allow visits in the authorization period.
 - We have comprehensive providers who are vendors in other counties, I am not sure why would such vendors be considered not providing quality services. We must come up with a distinction between these types of vendors.
- Eileen Mastricova:
 - This issue of cancellations is not just monetary.
- Jennifer Casassa:
 - NJID collects this data monthly, and it bears out in the exact opposite. 2/3 are family cancellations.
- Elisa Cohen:
 - How can we show the positive impact of EI when children are not getting the services, they need due to cancellations from illness?
 - Children and families are our priority.
- Cindy Hause:
 - Agencies need to notify SCs regarding multiple cancellations sooner than later so a review meeting can be completed.
 - Families must be reminded that it's ok to accept a lesser frequency of services.
- Barbra Bowers:
 - We also must remember that not every session needs to be made up, regardless of who has canceled. This also goes back to families feeling a sense of "entitlement" to having every missed session made up.
 - If our EI philosophy has families engaging and exchanging in services, this would prove that not every session would need to be made up and rescheduled.
 - I do agree that families should be held responsible for constant cancellation of services too.
- Theresa Perazzelli:
 - As a Supervisor for an EI Program, the most meaningful part of my job is supporting and encouraging as many professionals as possible in becoming experts in the field of infant and early childhood development. I want to create curiosity and competence in the ways of doing and being in this relationship-based work.
 - I am very excited about the department focus on supervision and professional development in the new LOA.
 - My concern is how the changes to comprehensive v. vendor status will impact an agency's ability to provide quality services against agencies with vendor status that traditionally have not.

- As a comprehensive agency, SJOGCS has invested in regular supervision, in-house training, regular staff meeting, reflective supervision, and resource heavy onboarding practices.
- Without a system in place to ensure that every agency is held to the same set of standards, agencies that invest in these costly practices will become less viable. Use of evidence-based practices will decline.
- Kimberly Peto:
 - Thank you to everyone. It has been my privilege and my pleasure to work with all of you. I know EI is in good hands with so many passionate advocates for our children, families, and staff, and in creating a stronger overall system.
- There were no additional public comments.

The next SICC public meeting is to be determined at the December 5, 2023 meeting.

MOTION to adjourn the meeting by Kimberly Peto and seconded by Kathleen Hinnigan-Cohen.