



**Friday, May 15, 2020
Global Meets Webinar**

Public Meeting 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

A regular public meeting of the New Jersey State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) was held on Friday, May 15, 2020. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held via Global Meets Webinar. The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Catherine (Kate) Colucci, Acting Chair. A quorum was declared.

Attendance – Maintained by the Department of Health

Welcome – Kate Colucci welcomed attendees. Due to COVID-19, the public meeting was held via conference call. Kate explained how the meeting format would be facilitated and asked that attendees email her questions or comments should they have any. The Welcome Statement was read.

Introductions – A role-call of SICC members, REIC Directors and DOH representatives

Approval of Minutes – Motion from Kate Colucci to approve January 24, 2020 meeting minutes; meeting minutes approved.

SICC Member Updates:

- No updates.

SICC Standing & Ad Hoc Committees:

1. **Service Delivery** – Joyce Salzberg, Chair reported:
The committee met twice on March 4th and May 5th. The group had a meeting with a representative from the Colorado Early Intervention System. The representative explained that in Colorado, all EIPs are required to attend a telehealth training, that include a coaching and collaborative models. Colorado provides more than one way to provide service, i.e., face-to-face and telehealth. Telehealth is especially beneficial when services are needed in the evenings, weekends and in rural areas. Equipment can be loaned to families. Insurance carriers, including Medicaid, covers telehealth services in Colorado. Providers are required to take a telehealth training including how to structure the session. There are several challenges in the use of telehealth. They include, perceptions, technology, Internet connectivity, equipment and Internet costs. Families need to be informed about the option of telehealth. The conversation begins with the Service Coordinator. There is also a need for research data demonstrating the effectiveness of telehealth services; Temple University may be a part of the research

project. There are certain types of services a family may need that telehealth would not be used for. Those services include nutrition, feeding, children with aspiration issues, very mobile children. Hybrid evaluations are conducted; one evaluates in person, while the other virtually. In Colorado, recordings of telehealth sessions are permitted in the Cloud. Agreements are needed between the family, EIP and practitioner for telehealth services. Joyce will put this and the additional information in a PowerPoint and share it at a later time.

The committee will be meeting again on May 20th and would like to extend an invitation to Kristen Kugelman and Susan Evans to attend. Joyce will also email the meeting notes to them.

Kate Colucci thanked Joyce Salzberg and the Service Delivery Committee for their contribution to the discussion on telehealth in January 2020. Due to Covid-19, the transition to using telehealth was made smoother as a result.

***ACTION:** Joyce Salzberg will develop a PowerPoint presentation on telehealth services*

2. **Higher Education** – Kate Colucci, Chair – no update
3. **Administrative/policy** – Chanell McDevitt, Chair – no update; draft budget to be discussed at the July 17th meeting
4. **State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)/Assessment** – vacant

***ACTION:** Budget discussion at the July 17th retreat*

Lead Agency Report – Susan Evans, Interim Part-C Coordinator

Note: The report from the Department of Health (DOH) on COVID-19 operations update report had been emailed to the SICC members. Report on file.

1. Part C Administration – ***OSEP***
Federal Application – DOH submitted the application to OSEP for Federal Part C funds on May 1st. The Department is seeking an award of over \$11M. OSEP has indicated there will not be disruption in the application process or the distribution of funds.

Annual Performance Report (APR) was certified by the SICC at the January meeting has been submitted to OSEP by February 1st as required. The DOH team responded to OSEP questions during the April clarification period.

The State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) was also submitted to OSEP on April 1st and the DOH team has responded to OSEP question on the SSIP during the April clarification period.

OSEP still plans to have the Determinations by June 23, 2020 and no delay is expected. Internally, the DOH is not sure if OSEP will find NJEIS in “Needs Assistance” or “Needs Requirement” category.

Federal Waivers have been requested for children with disabilities. In terms of NJEIS, the waiver would allow NJEIS to continue to provide services to children after they have turned three instead of Part B. At this point in time, NJEIS is operating as usual, i.e., Service Coordinators are sending referrals to districts. Secretary DeVos made a recommendation, and at this point, it is still only a recommendation. Until Congress passes it, DOH has no legal authority to continue to provide services to children that turned three, moreover, there is no funding for continued services. DOH members, including Sandra Howell, have been in constant contact with the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE). A guidance document is being created for DOH and DOE; once the document has been received, it will be emailed to NJEIS personnel. At this time, there are some districts that have not accepted referrals and expect NJEIS to continue to provide services to children that turned three – which is incorrect. NJDOE is working hard to squash inaccurate information.

Should the waiver pass in Congress, the State of New Jersey has the option to apply or not apply for the waiver.

There is potential federal CARES funding. Senator Maggie Hassan sent a letter to Senate Leadership supporting the IDEA emergency funds being advocated for and by the disability and early childhood community. The letter currently has support from some Senators and want to include at least \$11.9 billion in emergency funding into IDEA including an extra \$500 million for Part C and an extra \$400 million for preschool. If allocated in a similar fashion as the Aero funds (recovery funds back in 2009 or 2010), which means that NJ could potentially receive another \$11M if that transpires.

Susan Evans paused to see if anyone had any questions or comments; none received.

2. **Part C Administration - State Business:**

The Governor extended SYFY2020 through the end of September 2020. The State will be working on the State budget over the next few weeks. The Service Coordination Units (SCUs) and the Regional Early Intervention Collaboratives’ (REICs) grants have been submitted on time. DOH plans to move ahead unless and until told differently. The State has experienced a massive decrease in revenue and a massive increase in expenses; therefore, waiting to see how the budget will affect all the programs.

Cape May Health Department notified DOH that will not be reapplying for the Service Coordination Unit (SCU) grant for FY2021. The Southern New Jersey Perinatal Cooperative has applied for the grant to assume the Cape May SCU for 2021 planning for a July 1 transition.

The Department of Health (DOH) has issued a Request for Information (RFI) for potential data system vendors in pre-preparation for exploration of options at the expiration of the Public Consulting Group (PCG) contract. DOH is in year three of five with PCG; the

contract has an option of two one-year extensions. To date, six vendors have responded, including PCG. They have to go through a RFI process.

COVID-19 Policies and Procedures, including the current rate for telehealth, have extended until September 1, 2020. There is a stakeholders group working on a June to September plan. It may include some in-person visits, and some not. All plans for a return to in-person visits, meetings and evaluations will be approved by DOH Office Of Communicable Diseases.

The data showed that there was a big drop in referral rates from the middle of March, the referrals are well-below what the system usually receives. However, referrals are now slowly increasing. Families are not going to places where they typically get referred to early intervention, such as their healthcare providers, newborn screenings, and early childcare services. Some Early Intervention Providers (EIPs), such as Virtua and Ladacin. Have successfully been highlighted in press coverage. Talking points about the New Jersey Early Intervention System (NJEIS) has been developed and sent to the Governor's office for EI Week; not sure if it will be mentioned during one of his press releases.

As of May 13, 2020, 57% of families have some or all services through telehealth in place. That is up from starting telehealth services.

Comments:

Joyce Salzberg remarked that many EIPs were not satisfied with PCG and from her understanding that the contract is generally awarded to the lowest bidder. Joyce asked if that would happen again.

Susan Evans responded that due to COVID-19, the crises has highlighted for the State of the many antiquated data systems, particularly the unemployment data processing system. The post-mortem COVID-19 will help determine how to procure vendors, how fast, how up-to-date, with the IT project. It is, of course, her personal opinion. The State has received more interest to the proposal this time around.

Joyce Salzberg stated that EIPs have been disheartened with what PCG did to the system, practitioners and programs for over two years. Now our system (NJEIS) is going through COVID-19, she does not believe the system can endure yet another issue. PCG had provided such poor service and delivered poor software. A new system will have new software and not sure if our system can endure another change.

Susan Evans stated that PCG had made some good enhancements in EIMS and there are future enhancements in the pipeline. For example, Forms 13 and 25 along with electronic signatures and the ability to upload documents are in the works. Telehealth has helped push these changes forward.

David Holmes, ABCD asked Susan Evans as the system moves forward in the RFP process, would DOH consider input from the EIPs in the process? Would DOH consider,

in the process, piloting the electronic system before transitioning it? It was one of the things that were not done when EIMS was implemented.

David Holmes also asked if there were any inclination to use marketing strategies to increase the number of referrals. He stated that the agencies cannot wait for the increase in referrals to happen naturally. There is concerns that the numbers are not increasing each month. EIPS are down 40-50% of capacities and are providing few services. In addition to few children, providers are providing less services to those already in the system.

Joe Holahan remarked that he has already passed the word out (NJEIS is open to receiving referrals) within his own healthcare system. He asked if he could get a brief information bulletin, he could have it disseminated to the pediatricians within the State.

Susan Evans reported that a flyer has been developed announcing NJEIS is open has been developed and is now at the State's Communication Office. Once approved, she will provide it to Joe Holahan, notify SPAN, and CP&P.

Kate Colucci thanked Susan Evans for reaching out to the Governor's office with the flyer. However, she was disappointed that that office had never mentioned EI, not even the commissioner. She is pleased that Susan Evans will get the word out the NJEIS is up and running. She thought that it might be an interesting piece of information for the news-station, New Jersey 12 to know and broadcast. The station has been reporting on good things happening.

3. **REIC Refresh** - Susan Evans plans to provide a PowerPoint presentation on the updates and changes made to the REIC's roles and responsibilities. DOH is planning a State FY2021 Refresh REIC webinar presentation. One of the bigger changes relates to a Community Impression Plan followed by activities. It includes families, practitioners/administrators and community partners. An announcement will be sent out.
4. **Procedural Safeguards Office** – continues to be staffed by Barbara King and the Assistant Commissioner. Requests for Compensatory Service and No Practitioner Available (NPA) are both low and no requests for Mediation from the last SICC meeting. The requests for billing inquiry resulting from backlogging has decreased.
5. **Telehealth** – a work group has been assembled to address evaluations, services, meetings via telehealth and in-person visits. In-person visits will be determined by the Communicable Disease Department. Safety is of course a top concern. A webinar announcement on the June-September plan will be sent out.

New Business – REICs

1. Patti Ciccone reported on the outreach activities that all of the REICs conducted due to COVID-19. MidJersey Cares REIC developed a banner that had been disseminated widely. Postcards were also sent out. Outreach activities included, but not limited to, contacting families, physicians, community agencies, WIC offices, audiologists, the Family Helpline, local libraries, CP&P, County Councils for Young Children, county

Central Intake, Bergen Promise, Medical Daycares, SPAN, Family Success Centers and many more.

The Family Support Coordinators gathered and listed information on the Family Matters website, such as developmentally appropriate activities, Youtube videos, virtual activities, ideas on what to do at home for families that are sheltered in with their infants and toddlers. In addition, telehealth videos and community resources (housing, food, mental health, family care, and more) were also added to the Family Matters website (<http://www.thefamilymatterswebsite.org/>).

Some of the EIPs, such as Virtua and St. Joseph's School for the Blind, discussed early intervention in the press.

The Family Support Coordinators also organized virtual Early Intervention Week 2020 activities and provided archived webinars throughout the State. Libraries hosted activities and/or posted information about EI on their websites.

Kate Colucci read a question that was emailed to her from a public member. The public member inquired whether or not former families in EI were contacted to let them know EI is up and running, in the event they had other children in the home that might need EI.

The REIC executive directors, Patti Ciccone and Jennifer Buzby stated they will discuss and consider the suggestion. Families, however, that had been in EI are still on their email directories and receive information on a regular basis.

Old Business – Kate Colucci reported:

1. SICC Member Appointments – due to the current circumstances, there has not yet been a response from the Governor's office. The SICC has received resumes from family members interested in serving on the SICC; those resumes have been forwarded.
2. SICC Meeting Location – initially, the July 2020 meeting was allocated for new members. Despite not having new members, Kate Colucci suggested a virtual meeting still ensue to review the budget, service delivery and new data system.

Discussion:

Kate Colucci asked Susan Evans if the July meeting should be a "makeup" for the missed March meeting (due to COVID-19).

Susan Evans stated she would need to get back to the SICC on that, however, she suggested scheduling a retreat at that time. An in-person meeting is doable if under 15 attendees, but it would be up to the Council to decide on whether the July meeting would be a public meeting or retreat.

Kate asked the SICC members if they recommend a retreat or public meeting as well as in-person or virtually (through Zoom).

Joe Holahan, Joyce Salzberg and Michele Christopoulos agreed to have a retreat in July.

Kate stated the next SICC retreat will be on Friday, July 17, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. In June, the venue for the retreat will be decided. If the meeting is held virtually, it will be limited to two hours. At that meeting, a future location for meetings should be discussed. SICC members verbally agreed.

***ACTION:** Discussion on future locations for SICC meetings*

3. Joyce Salzberg shared a story she read in the 5/13/20 New York Times, *The Extra Burden on Families with Children with Special Needs*. from a developmental pediatrician reporting how COVID-19 has particularly impacted families of children with special needs.

Comments:

Joe Holahan remarked that the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued posters for families on how to manage your time at home (educational, behavioral) with your children due to COVID-19.

Kate Colucci shared that she, as an Occupational Therapist for NJIT is providing virtual services. She has taken advantage of many online trainings and peer supervision. Kate wanted to share a resource with the EIPS. The Interdisciplinary Council for Developmental and Learning (ICDL) has many trainings and peer supervision, both free and with a fee. Kate stated the trainings have helped her and built her confidence in providing the virtual venue in providing services.

Susna Evans has a New Business *ask* she is requesting from the SICC. She would like to share information with Chanell McDevitt as well. It has come to her attention that insurance companies are now requesting different information on the Explanation of Benefits (EOBs). She is requesting a small committee to help the State staff look at the changes the insurance companies are now requesting and what changes need to be made on the EOBs.

Kate Colucci stated it will be added to the agenda for the upcoming meeting in July.

***ACTION:** Determine a committee to discuss what information is needed on the EOBs that insurance companies are now requesting.*

Susan Evans also reported that the rates for telehealth services, at this time, will remain the same as the in-person rates. However, future rates will be based on the outcome of the rate study. It has been reported that families' perceptions of whether or not they should pay the same rate of service for telehealth as for the in-person service.

Kate Colucci received a question from a public member and read it. "In the event there are any changes in the Federal or State decision to extend EI services beyond a child's third birthday, how would that be handled for those children who are now being closed out."

Susan Evans stated that without significant considerations for funding, DOH is not sure if NJEIS will hold onto children that are no longer in EI. Should families (children over 3) stay in EI (Part C), they would be subjected to a family cost-share, without FAPE (Part B). The best way for children to receive needed services is for the school district to determine eligibility and provide services to those eligible children. They can contract with EIPS independently to provide services. However, NJEIS does not have a mechanism to pay EIPS; EIMS will reject it. There are lots of logistical concerns, as well as FAPE.

Kate Colucci stated from the perspective of the children/families that are turning three from now through September, can be scary and a great loss for those kids who need the services. There should be a way for the system to create a temporary way to support children and families until September until schools are ready.

Joyce Salzberg commented that some families do not want to pay their full cost-share for telehealth services. However, if you look at universities, they are charging the same tuition for online courses. It is valuing our professionals that are providing quality services. She recognized that there might be public comment on the issue.

Kate Colucci read another statement she received from a public member (Roberta from Rowan). There are some school districts that know how to contract with EIPS; Rowan has had many such contracts with school districts.

Kate Colucci read a question she received from Maureen, the Director at Hudson Milestones. She wanted to know if there were any considerations for makeups for those families that elected to “standby”, i.e., wait for in-person services through September.

Susan Evans responded that SCUs continue to revisit those families that elected to wait for in-person services to see if they have reconsidered telehealth services. Compensatory Services is the only mechanism in EIMS that will allow EIPs to get paid for makeup services (after a child turns three).

Kat Colucci read a comment from Maureen (Hudson Milestones) that they are encouraging families to use virtual services, however any delays are only delaying the children.

Kate Colucci read the last public comment. It was from David Holmes (ABCD). He wanted to thank Susan Evans for the update to the providers and would appreciate continued updates.

Public Comment – no other public comments received. Susan Evans mentioned she will continue to provide updates and specifically on the Part C to Part B and REIC Refresh.

Adjournment – 12:33 p.m. upon motion by Kate Colucci and unanimously carried.

Next Meeting: SICC RETREAT (NO PUBLIC MEETING) scheduled for July 17, 2020. Time and venue to be determined.

