

Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC)

Videoconference

Meeting Date

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

Members:

Commissioner Adam Crum
Commissioner Michael Johnson
Abbe Hensley
Anne Shade
Beverly Schoonover
Brian Holst
Christie Reinhardt
Matthew Hirschfeld
Maureen Harwood
Shawnda O'Brien (for Christina Hulquist)
Stephanie Berglund
Supanika Ackerman
Trevor Storrs

Guests

Carmen Wenger
Debbie Cheatham
Don Enoch
Jamie Colvard
Jimael Johnson
Kathy Berry
Meghan Johnson
Panu Lucier
Rebekah Morisse
Shannon Parker
Tamar Ben Yosef

Staff:

Kristen Spencer, DEED
Emily Urlacher, DHSS

Prepared by: Paula DiPaolo, Peninsula Reporting

CALL TO ORDER – 1:00 p.m.

Roll Call

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Following a videoconference briefing, Commissioner Crum and Commissioner Johnson welcomed attendees to the meeting. Roll call was taken, and guests were introduced.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Trevor Storrs **MOVED** to approve the minutes from the March 25, 2021 meeting, **SECONDED** by Matthew Hirschfeld. Hearing no objection, the motion **PASSED**, and the minutes were approved as presented.

ALASKA STATE OF BABIES YEARBOOK REPORT

Jamie Colvard and Debbie Cheatham from Zero to Three presented to the Council on the State of Babies Yearbook. Jamie Colvard explained that Zero to Three is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization. Their mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life, and they do that by creating resources for parents who have infants and toddlers, by supporting professionals who work with young children and families with the knowledge and tools to support healthy development, and to work with policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders involved in system building and policy making at the state and federal levels.

About the 2021 Yearbook – 3rd Ed.

- Takes a holistic look at the nation’s babies with a sharper focus on equity.
- Presents a snapshot nationally and state by state of how infants, toddlers, and their families are faring.
- Pairs data with responsive policy recommendations to serve as a tool for state policymakers and advocates.
- Includes the RAPID-EC Survey in parts of the findings.
- Data presented in the yearbook is from before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the health and economic crises have only worsened the challenges.

GROW

System utilized to group states into one of four tiers that are approximately equal in size:

- **Getting Started**
- **Reaching Forward**
- **Improving Outcomes**
- **Working Effectively.**

All states have room to improve. States can also be doing well in one area and have significant room for improvement in others. www.stateofbabies.org contains detailed information about states' profiles.

What is the State of Babies in Alaska?

- 30,176 infants and toddlers.
- 30.8 percent of babies live in households with income less than twice the federal poverty line (FPL). Of these, 15.4 percent live in poverty.
- 32.3 percent of Alaska's infants and toddlers live in rural areas.

Diversity of Alaska's Babies:

- 49 percent white
- 18 percent American Indian/Alaska Native
- 13 percent multiple races
- 10 percent Hispanic
- 4 percent Asian
- 3 percent black.

Income:

- 69.2 percent of families are above low income
- 15.4 percent low income
- 15.4 percent poverty.

Good Health in Alaska – Alaska Ranks “G” – Getting Started

Ranking is based on indicators of maternal and child health including health care coverage, prenatal care, birth outcomes, food security, and nutrition.

Access and Affordability:

- Medicaid Expansion State:
 - Alaska – Yes.
 - National – 39 states.
- Medicaid Eligibility Limits for Pregnant Women:
 - Alaska – 205 percent of FPL. Eligibility level in AK is at the higher end.
 - National – 200 percent of FPL (range is 138 to 380 percent). 24 states are greater than 200 percent FPL.
- Low Income Uninsured Infants and Toddlers:
 - Alaska – 13.7 percent of babies in families with low income are uninsured.
 - National – 5.1 percent.

- Coverage available through Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) has helped to decrease the number of infants and toddlers who lack health insurance, but the reach of those programs is still not complete.
- Data source for this indicator is the American Community Survey and does not include coverage from the Indian Health Services.
- The rates of uninsured white and American Indian/Alaska Natives babies are substantially higher than other demographics and the national level.

Trevor Storrs commented that Indian Health is not insurance and does not translate to service outside of Alaska like health insurance does.

- Medical Home:
 - Alaska – 56.1 percent of infants and toddlers had a medical home:
 - Low Income: 42.9 percent
 - Above Low Income: 61.7 percent.
 - National – 51 percent:
 - Low Income: 40.8 percent
 - Above Low Income: 57.9 percent.

Maternal Health:

- Late or No Prenatal Care:
 - Alaska – 5.8 percent of pregnant women received late or no prenatal care. Significant differences by race/ethnicity.
 - National – 6.2 percent.
- Maternal Mortality:
 - Alaska – Not reportable; not consistently reported across states.
 - National – 17.4 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births. Significant differences by race/ethnicity:
 - Hispanic – 11.8
 - White – 14.9
 - Black – 37.3

Birth Outcomes:

- Infant Mortality:
 - Alaska – 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births.
 - National – 5.7.
 - American Indian/Alaska Native – 10.2 percent.
 - White – 4.2 percent.
- Preterm Birth:
 - Alaska – 9.3 percent of babies born preterm.

- National – 10 percent.
- Low Birthweight:
 - Alaska – 5.9 percent of babies born at low birthweight.
 - National – 8.3 percent.
 - Low birthweight for black and Hispanic babies is more than double that for white babies in 15 states including Alaska and the District of Columbia.

Preventative Care:

- Preventative Medical Care Received:
 - Alaska – 89 percent of infants and toddlers had a well-child medical visit within the past year:
 - Low Income: 88.4 percent of babies.
 - Above Low Income: 89.2 percent of babies.
 - National – 91.1 percent:
 - Low Income: 87.8 percent of babies.
 - Above Low Income: 93.4 percent of babies.
- Received Recommended Vaccines:
 - Alaska – 68.2 percent of babies receive the recommended vaccines by ages 19 through 35 months:
 - Low Income: 69.6 percent of babies.
 - Above Low Income: 67.1 percent of babies.
 - National – 72.8 percent:
 - Low Income: 66.6 percent of babies.
 - Above Low Income: 78.9 percent of babies.

Maternal and Infant Mental Health:

- Mothers Reporting Less Than Optimal Mental Health:
 - Alaska – 23 percent:
 - Low Income: 34.9 percent
 - Above Low Income: 18.3 percent
 - National – 20.3 percent.
- Maternal Depression Screening During Well-Child Visits (covered by Medicaid):
 - Alaska – No policy.
 - National – 37 states require, recommend, or allow.
- Social-Emotional Screening (covered by Medicaid):
 - Alaska – Yes.
 - National – 43 states cover social-emotional screening for children ages 0 - 6.

Food and Nutrition:

- Food Insecurity:
 - Alaska – 17.1 percent of households with babies experience low or very low food security.
 - National – 13.7 percent.
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Coverage:
 - Alaska – 56 percent of eligible infants participate.
 - National – 79.3 percent.
 - With higher food insecurity rates, there is an opportunity for Alaska to increase participation in WIC.
 - There are some important provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act related to WIC that might be of interest to Alaska.

Additional Strategies to Improve Outcomes:

- Increase health insurance coverage.
- Strengthen access to good nutrition.
- Improve maternal mental health care.
- Transform pediatric care to become the gateway to comprehensive family-centered care and developmental support.
- Continue to strengthen social-emotional developmental supports for babies and families.

Kathy Berry from Health Care Services commented that as of April of 2021, the division sent out a policy clarification on pregnant and postpartum depression screening, which Alaska Medicaid does cover.

Strong Families in Alaska – Alaska Ranks “G” – Getting Started

- Family Resilience:
 - Alaska – 90.3 percent of families with babies report a favorable level:
 - Low Income: 92.2 percent
 - Above Low Income: 89.6 percent.
 - National – 85.3 percent.
- TANF Benefits Receipt Among Families in Poverty:
 - Alaska – 21 percent of families with babies at the poverty level.
 - National – 21.7 percent.
- Home Visiting:
 - Alaska – 1.8 percent of potential home visiting beneficiaries served.
 - National – 2 percent.

- Link to data that captures both state and tribal home visiting data – www.nhvrc.org
- Over 4,500 home visits were made to 787 families and 721 children using the evidence-based home visiting models of the Early Head Start Home-Based Option, Nurse Family Partnership, and Parents As Teachers through 15 local agencies statewide:
 - 45 percent American Indian/Alaska Native
 - 32 percent white
 - 14 percent multiple race
 - 11 percent Hispanic
 - 4 percent Asian
 - 4 percent black
 - 2 percent Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - 13 percent are 3 to 5 years old
 - 85 percent have public insurance
 - 6 percent have private insurance
 - 8 percent have no insurance at all
 - 85 percent are English speaking
 - 12 percent are other
 - 3 percent are Spanish speaking
 - 63,400 children could benefit from home visiting:
 - 11,900 infants less than 1 year old
 - 21,100 toddlers 1 to 2 years
 - 30,500 preschoolers 3 to 5 years.
 - 48,200 families could benefit from home visiting:
 - 23 percent have a child under 1 year old
 - 20 percent are low income
 - 19 percent are single mother households
 - 4 percent have a parent with no high school diploma
 - 4 percent are a pregnant woman or mother under the age of 21
 - Of the 48,200 families that could benefit:
 - 48 percent of families met one or more targeting criteria.
 - 16 percent of families met two or more targeting criteria.

Influences on Well-Being:

- Crowded Housing:
 - Alaska – 19.6 percent of babies.
 - National – 15.5 percent.
- Unsafe Neighborhoods:
 - Alaska – 5.1 percent of parents with babies.

- National – 4.9 percent.
- Two or More Adverse Childhood Experiences:
 - Alaska – 4.4 percent of babies.
 - National – 7.7 percent.

Child Welfare:

- Maltreatment Rate:
 - Alaska – 22.7 per 1,000 children ages 0 to 2.
 - National – 16.4 per 1,000.
- Removed from Home:
 - Alaska – Yes.
 - National – 39 states.
 - 38.6 percent are American Indian/Alaska Native.
 - 31.7 percent are multiple races.
 - 8.3 percent are Hispanic.
 - 7.5 percent are white.
- Time in Out-of-Home Placement:
 - Alaska – 9.1 percent of babies exited foster care in less than 12 months.
 - National – 18.7 percent.
 - 12.2 percent are American Indian/Alaska Native.

Supportive Policies:

- Paid Family Leave:
 - Alaska – No.
 - National – 10 states provide paid family and medical leave.
- Paid Sick Leave:
 - Alaska – No.
 - National – 12 states require employers to provide paid sick days that cover care for a child.
- State Child Tax Credit (CTC):
 - Alaska – No.
 - National – 6 states offer CTC to offset the cost of raising a child.
- State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)
 - Alaska – No.
 - National – 30 states provide EITC to boost families' income.

It was noted that although Alaska does not offer any of the above-mentioned programs, Alaska does have the Permanent Fund Dividend.

Additional Strategies:

- Enhanced support for families' basic needs.
- Community systems to strengthen families and support parents.
- Developmentally appropriate child welfare policies and practices for infants and toddlers.

Positive Early Learning Experiences in Alaska – Alaska Ranks “W” – Working Effectively

Early Care and Education Opportunities:

Data from the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative

- Parent reports reading to baby every day:
 - Alaska – 48.7 percent of parents:
 - Low Income: 46.4 percent.
 - Above Low Income: 49.6 percent.
 - National – 37.2 percent:
 - Low Income: 27.6 percent.
 - Above Low Income: 43.8 percent.
- Parent reports singing to baby every day:
 - Alaska – 72.3 percent of parents:
 - Low Income: 76.1 percent.
 - Above Low Income: 70.8 percent.
 - National – 57.4 percent:
 - Low Income: 49 percent.
 - Above Low Income: 63 percent.

Access to Early Care and Education Opportunities:

- Average cost of care as a percentage of median income:
 - Alaska – 11.7 percent - married families; 32.7 percent - single parents.
 - National – Not available.
- Families above 200 percent of FPL eligible for child care subsidy:
 - Alaska – Yes.
 - National – 13 states.
- Percentage of income eligible infants/toddlers with Early Head Start access:
 - Alaska – 20 percent.
 - National – 11 percent.

Early Intervention and Prevention Services:

Data from National Child Health Services

- Developmental Screening:
 - Alaska – 42.9 percent of infants and toddlers aged 9 to 35 months received a developmental screening in the past year:
 - Low Income: 46.4 percent.
 - Above Low Income: 41.1 percent.
 - National – 32.5 percent:
 - Low Income: 27.2 percent.
 - Above Low Income: 36 percent.
- Part C Services Received:
 - Alaska – 5.7 percent of infants and toddlers received IDEA Part C services.
 - National – 6.8 percent.

Additional Strategies:

- Strengthen a comprehensive, high-quality child care system for all working families.
- Expansion of Early Head Start.
- Strengthen Part C early intervention services.

Additional Resources:

- State Profile – <https://stateofbabies.org/state/alaska/>
- State Profile Navigator – https://stateofbabies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/state_profile_navigator.pdf
- Racism Creates Inequalities in Maternal and Child Health, Even Before Birth
- Think Babies – <https://www.thinkbabies.org/>
- State Initiatives – <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/state-initiatives>
- What’s in the American Rescue Plan for Babies?
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3969-what-s-in-the-american-rescue-plan-for-babies>

HELP ME GROW ALASKA PROGRAM UPDATE

Carmen Wenger, program director for Help Me Grow Alaska, shared that the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership (A2P2) is the organizing entity for Help Me Grow Alaska, and its core purpose is excellent health for all of Alaska’s kids.

Help Me Grow Alaska is based on four core components:

- **Centralized Access Point** – Families, community members, and providers can call for resources and referrals.

- **Family and Community Outreach** – Community partners are in various communities throughout the state sharing about Help Me Grow Alaska services.
- **Child Health Provider Outreach** – Help Me Grow Alaska staff members provide outreach and education to health providers in the state.
- **Data Collection and Analysis** – The information that helps to support the work that is done and needs to be done in the state.

What is Help Me Grow Alaska as a System?

Core Purpose: Building a system where every Alaskan kid has what they need to grow and succeed. Strategic plan has been developed with goals through 2023:

- **Strategic Goal 1:** Help Me Grow Alaska strengthens the system of care by promoting developmental health and supporting families in connection to relevant, timely services.
- **Strategic Goal 2:** Help Me Grow Alaska generates data that is accurate, detailed, and readily available to inform and support communities, partners, and advocacy.
- **Strategic Goal 3:** Help Me Grow Alaska has a broad statewide presence through highly engaged partnerships.
- **Strategic Goal 4:** Help Me Grow Alaska has the capacity to achieve its core purpose.

What is Help Me Grow Alaska to Families?

Help Me Grow Alaska is a system connecting children and families with the services they need:

- Help with parenting and child development questions
- Connect to community resources and activities
- Access developmental monitoring and screening tools
- All services are free and open to any Alaskan family
- Serves families prenatally through age 26
- Translation services available.

Strategic Alignment

Help Me Grow Alaska has natural areas of alignment with Alaska’s Early Childhood Strategic Plan in:

- Goal 1 – Strategies 1.1, 1.2, 2.2, and 2.3
- Goal 3 – Strategy 10.1, Action b.

Strengthening Families:

Integrating the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework into the Help Me Grow Alaska model to help families build and sustain resiliency:

1. Parental resilience
2. Social connections
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development
4. Concrete support in times of need
5. The social-emotional competence of children.

Promoting Developmental Health

- **Families:**
 - Offering developmental screening and developmental monitoring tools to families
 - Linking families to resources, support, and information following monitoring and screening.
- **Providers:**
 - Helping providers offer tools to families
 - Increasing access to high quality trainings.
- **Data:**
 - Coordinating with efforts across the state to better understand which children are getting screened and who may be missed by current efforts.

In 2020, Help Me Grow Alaska commissioned a report on developmental screening in Alaska including sections on status, leadership, development, and structure. The full report is available on the Help Me Grow Alaska website along with a recording of a follow-up webinar. There has been significant progress on the recommendations since the publication of the report.

Developmental Screening Training

Help Me Grow Alaska worked with partners through the Preschool Development Grant funds last year to produce a training that targets early childhood educators, home visitors, and early interventionists. Through the work of the Universal Developmental Screening Advisory Committee, they are now pursuing accreditation for the training to offer continuing education to community health aides. The training is free, available online, and offers a completion certificate. It is used in conjunction with the CDC training on developmental monitoring.

Cultural Functionality

Help Me Grow Alaska has been adapting CDC materials on developmental monitoring to be culturally functional for different regions of Alaska. They worked with the Early Childhood Coalition in the Norton Sound region, Kodiak Area Native Association, Tlingit and Haida Head Start in Southeast Alaska, and others to adapt versions of the Learn the Signs, Act Early developmental monitoring tools and to create a pilot project around the Ages & Stages Questionnaire III companion documents that are culturally relevant to the specific regions.

Local Adaptations

Help Me Grow Alaska is leading the project to adapt and re-illustrate developmental books targeted at infants and toddlers to be used statewide. Alaskan artists are working to have the materials reflect the environment and animals that are familiar with Alaskan children. It will allow developmental information be more accessible for Alaskan families, and it promotes early

literacy and uses developmental information with the book that has been adapted based on the information Help Me Grow Alaska has learned through community work. They will also be republishing the Milestone Moments booklet using similar information with Alaskan pictures.

Alaska's Early Childhood Network

In partnership with the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS), Help Me Grow Alaska is working to bring together early childhood leaders from around the state to share what they are learning in their communities to learn from one another and support each other in an effort to elevate the focus on early childhood health and well-being in their individual areas and the state as a whole.

Purpose and Scope: To bring together the leads of the statewide early childhood coalitions and child-focused groups for the purpose of networking, resource sharing, and specific didactic training. ECCs and Help Me Grow Alaska offer monthly or quarterly meetings to foster deeper connection and communication amongst those working in the field of early childhood and provide opportunities to develop and share ideas for this work.

Emily Urlacher thanked Carmen Wenger and Help Me Grow for being an amazing partner with the ECCS grant. She looks forward to expanding the Early Childhood Network, which has gone from 12 communities to 14.

Provider Connections

Dedicated time for the staff of Help Me Grow Alaska and specific service providers to review the mission and scope of the agency as well as to discuss ways that Help Me Grow Alaska can support the agency and to identify the process for connection to families in need of services specific to this agency. The audience is primarily targeting Help Me Grow Alaska family support specialists and outreach staff, but it's open to all community liaisons.

Health Care Provider Outreach

- Outreach and education about Help Me Grow Alaska services, including partner programs such as PAL-PAK.
- Connection to developmental screening tools, training, and technical assistance.
- Newly adapted training module on developmental surveillance and screening with upcoming modules on early relational health and postpartum mood disorders.

Help Me Grow Alaska Centralized Access Point

- Family support specialists are available by phone to answer questions, provide follow up, and ongoing support as needed.

- Families call from anywhere in the state to ask questions regarding child development, community and medical resources, children’s behavior/mental health services, and getting connected to a medical home.
- Provide access to developmental and social-emotional screenings.
- Connecting families, caregivers, providers, and agencies with local community resource.

PAL-PAK – Partnership Access Line – Pediatric Alaska

Child psychiatric consultation program for primary care providers in partnership with the Division of Behavioral Health and Seattle Children’s Hospital. The program is designed to increase the capacity of mental health services through primary care. Prescribing providers can call and get a free consultation with a pediatric psychiatrist. Their live answer rate is 85 percent. Providers can get support for a specific patient, do consultations, get information on a general psychiatric question, or do a medication review. Help Me Grow partners with them to do outreach to providers in Alaska, and they also manage the referrals.

Data

Help Me Grow Alaska has been experiencing some significant growth. They are just finalizing the draft of their program evaluation, and in 2020 they served more than twice the number of contacts they served in 2019. They are also on track to have significant expansion in 2021.

- Cases opened last 30 days – 27
- Cases opened year to date – 196
- Total cases last year – 272
- Total Help Me Grow Alaska cases - 809

Primary Reason for Call

Starting in 2020, there has been a shift from primarily developmental health to a larger percentage of mental health and behavioral health.

Calls have originated from all over the state and some have been from out of state. Commissioner Johnson asked why people would call from out of state. Carmen Wenger explained that some people who call don’t know anything about Alaska, but they found Help Me Grow Alaska on the internet. Those calls are not recorded in their data. The data reflects calls from providers who have a client moving to Alaska to get them connected to a provider before they arrive. They have also had calls from family members located outside of the state who were looking for support for an Alaskan family.

Stephanie Berglund asked how most people are hearing about Help Me Grow. Carmen Wenger explained that the primary referral is through a health care provider. The second highest mode of

entry is someone hearing about Help Me Grow Alaska through outreach efforts. 51.5 percent of the referrals are health care provider referrals.

Community Resources

Help Me Grow Alaska, in partnership with Connect Mat-Su and LINKS, has a community resource database that is accessible to multiple agencies. A limited subset of those resources is available through the Connect Mat-Su website. The resources are broken out by type, and they are searchable by over 440 categories and subcategories.

AMERICAN RECOVERY PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDING UPDATES

Commissioner Crum explained that the report from the Conference Committee included ARPA funding, and it was a total of \$78M covering FY'21 to '22; and \$94.3M for FY'21 through '24. The total is \$172M over roughly three-and-a-half fiscal years.

From the \$78M for FY'21-'22, there is a child care block grant of \$28.4M; child care stabilization grant of \$45.5M; a child nutrition pandemic EBT program for \$768,000; and pandemic TANF of \$3.4M. These dollars are prescribed dollars, which was set out directly in the bill by Congress.

Shawnda O'Brien explained that in terms of the child care funding, they are still working with the Administration for Children and Families on designing whatever documents will need to be in place for providers to apply for funds. In the interim, they are meeting with stakeholder groups, and they are in the process of trying to start having conversations with tribal partners.

Shawnda O'Brien continued on to state that this summer the Division of Public Assistance will continue to cover co-pays with some of the block grant funds the state had been receiving as a regular part of the block grant award. She believes that will also help them to leverage some of the newer funding in a different way. What they are trying to focus on now is to sustain moving forward while they are adjusting the rate structure.

Trevor Storrs asked if the division was receiving community feedback for how to use the ARPA child care dollars to set up the system in a strategic way that could transform the system and make it stronger. Shawnda O'Brien stated that they conducted a provider survey this spring asking how these dollars might help benefit. A lot of the responses were tied more to recovery and getting some of the dollars out there to help support infrastructure. In terms of long-term sustainability, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in order to figure out what best will meet the needs. The rate structure is one area they have struggled with considerably, and they are still struggling to figure out how to meet that need. There are some new funding opportunities being provided to states from the Administration on Children and Families that the division is going to try and take advantage of in the next couple of weeks. They are going to submit their application to have some supports in redesigning how to get to that cost of care question and look at redesigning rate structures related to what the actual costs are.

Trevor Storrs commented that he thinks about all the oil tax credits and that the state puts millions of dollars into the oil industry. Have they thought about using these dollars to transform how they are looking at child care? He wondered if this is a legislative issue. He noted that oil tax credits allow oil companies to pay high wages and offer benefits, but the child care industry scrambles to find people to work for wages that are below what a gas attendant makes. Commissioner Crum stated that this is a legislative issue. With the funds that come out of the Division of Public Assistance, there are set parameters, and it is a very consistent formula on how that has always gone out the door as well as the licensing aspect. He noted when the state received the CARES dollars, it was the first surplus funding that was ever allocated to child care providers. Now under the ARPA funding, they have items in there which semi formulate, but it's a little bit different, and Division of Public Assistance is not really designed around that.

Commissioner Crum stated that the legislature will be taking up the \$1B in discretionary funds that ARPA provided to the state. Part of that is a lot of dollars towards innovation in capital-based projects, and there will be a lot of flexibility in that. This is where the conversation needs to be directed.

Stephanie Berglund commented that people are excited about the child care allocation through the stimulus dollars, albeit prescribed. To Trevor's point, she is interested in the Commissioner's advice or guidance for how they can reimagine or rebuild the system stronger. This group has adopted the Early Childhood Strategic Plan, which has a roadmap of what they need for building the system stronger. She wondered if there is an idea of what they could do with that in terms of a recommendation for the discretionary dollars, perhaps alignment around the workforce. She believes this is a huge opportunity, and she just wants to ensure they are leveraging that and utilizing it the best way they can. Commissioner Crum noted that he is currently focused on Medicaid and his remaining CARES dollars, so he hasn't had much time to ponder what these prescribed dollars look like other than they have to have some other level of engagement and discussion about whether or not to use the strategic plan to bring forward to some legislative committees. There is a conversation that needs to be had around this, but the department will not be able to address this for at least three weeks as they are closing out their fiscal year.

Christie Reinhardt commented that she, Emily Urlacher, Carmen Wenger, and Supanika Ackerman participated in a seizing opportunity webinar focused on all this funding. A couple of the big messages were around workforce development and opportunities for increasing wages within the field. Another emphasis was on including the parent voice in the planning. One of the takeaways from the webinar was that they are going to continue to convene Region 10 to talk amongst themselves about what they are using the money for, share ideas, and leverage opportunities and trainings.

Supanika Ackerman added that it was nice to hear about what other states are doing with the funding, but it's also good for people to know what things are going on in Alaska. Head Start

received \$1B, which breaks down to about \$3.6M to all 17 Head Start grantees in the state. Each of those Head Starts has their own discretion on how to spend that funding around workforce in all the communities. Head Start is in 118 different communities across Alaska. It is good to know how the monies are being spent at the local level where there are opportunities for training and collaboration. She suggested setting up a cohort, and after reviewing the bylaws she determined the AECCC could form a committee that could look at how some of these ARPA funds are being set up in the different departments and programs.

Commissioner Crum stated that the \$98M for FY'21 – '24 is also prescribed dollars and includes such activities as COVID testing in school districts and funding for COVID-19 vaccination activities.

Commissioner Johnson explained that the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) ARPA funding is a little bit different. They do get some set aside, but the vast majority is going out to school districts, and the districts have total discretion on spending it. They don't have to spend it according to the federal law, and the department does not get to direct how districts spend their money. What the department is doing is trying to work with partners to help them make good decisions on how to spend the money. With some of the set aside, the department is going to use that as a match to incentivize specific uses of the funds. He encouraged members of the Council to work with their local school boards. The DEED's website details the amounts each district will receive.

Christie Reinhardt commented that the Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting program (MIECHV) has already awarded their \$165,000 of ARPA funding. The entire program received \$150M, of which \$40M was given out in this first award. The next award will be out sometime next year, and that will be the remainder of those funds through 2023. The Alaska MIECHV program has proposed a professional development series using an ECHO model that will be open for all home visitors across the state including Early Head Start, Parents As Teachers, and the Nurse Family Partnership program. Infant Learning Program will also be invited.

ALASKA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CORE KNOWLEDGE COMPETENCIES (CKCs)

Panu Lucier, director of SEED, thread Alaska, began her presentation by stating that the first edition of the Alaska's Early Care and Learning Core Knowledge and Competencies was published in 2015 and was adopted by the State Board of Education. The second edition was published in April 2018 and added administrator competencies. The third edition was just updated a few months ago to align with the National Association of Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) 2019 updated core knowledge and competencies.

Core Knowledge and Competencies

- Foundation of early childhood professional development systems.
- For all professional development levels and for all settings.

- Knowledge, central concepts, and observable skills that adults who work with young children birth to 8 need to know and do to facilitate young children’s learning and development.

In 2015, the Institute of Medicine published “*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation.*”

- Blueprint for action
- Foundation of child development
- Shared knowledge and competencies for early care and education professionals.

In 2019, NAEYC “*Power to the Profession: A Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Profession.*” “There is no path to high-quality early childhood education without effective early childhood educators.” The NAEYC then updated their CKCs, which led to Alaska’s CKCs.

SEED: Alaska’s Statewide Professional Development System:

- Head Start/Early Head Start
- Child care programs (centers and homes)
- Pre-kindergarten programs in community-based and school settings
- Public school programs (K-3)
- Before/after school programs
- Early intervention and special education services
- Home visiting programs
- thread training
- Higher education institutions (UAA/UAF)
- Alaska Departments of Education and Early Development and Health and Social Services.

Alaska’s CKCs are linked to:

- Alaska SEED Career Ladder
- Alaska SEED trainer and training approval systems
- Alaska Early Learning Guidelines
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems
- Learn & Grow
- It’s also a tool to help support self reflection and track progress as people advance in their training and education
- For use by parents as well.

A side-by-side comparison of a portion of the 1st Ed. and 3rd Ed. was shown to members of the Council, and the document was explained.

Stephanie Berglund asked if SEED had received any feedback on the updated CKCs. Panu Lucier stated that they haven’t heard any feedback yet. She noted that the document is a spiral-

bound document that is easily opened and laid flat and is also available in digital form. SEED is aligning their training to the CKCs, and the universities have been using the CKCs in their coursework as well. She stated that she would appreciate hearing feedback from anyone on the AECCC that has had experience using the CKCs within their programs. She would also appreciate feedback on how they might do outreach in terms of promoting the use of the CKCs. SEED hopes that these CKCs won't just sit on a shelf and that programs will use them. They have printed hard copies they can mail to programs that request them.

EARLY CHILDHOOD GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE UPDATE

Tamar Ben-Yosef reminded members of the Council that the Statewide Early Childhood Strategic Plan was adopted in March of 2021. The strategy under goal three of the plan states that Alaskan children and families are supported by a functional, comprehensive, mixed-delivery early childhood system. The action from that was to form the governance workgroup with the focus on creating an improved, sustainable, and accountable governance approach with decision-making authority.

The goal of this workgroup, that has been meeting since February 2020, is to develop recommendations and a proposal for a new governance design so that the programs and funding streams are harnessed in a set strategic direction as well as to establish roles and responsibilities to implement the strategic plan for improved outcomes for children and families. The workgroup is working with two national consultants, and the tri-leads are Tamar Ben-Yosef, Jimael Johnson, and Christina Hulquist. All of the members are stakeholders from the field.

Tamar Ben-Yosef stated that the workgroup is currently in the stage of developing the draft concept for the design. They have also developed a draft outreach plan that they will use to engage with stakeholders, including the AECCC. The outreach plan is in four phases:

- Phase 1 (and throughout): To increase dialogue on the importance of governance change for Alaska's early childhood system. This will be ongoing in conversations internally within organizations, and externally between members of the group and other organizations and advocacy work.
- Phase 2: Raise awareness and solicit feedback on the draft concept for governance change. Under this phase they will be informing audiences on the history and need for governance change and asking questions to garner targeted feedback on the concept.
- Phase 3: Conducting a formal campaign to encourage governance change based on feedback that the draft concept is what Alaska needs, and secure enthusiasm and endorsement.
- Phase 4: Inform audience on next steps.

Tamar stated that they expect the outreach and engagement will start happening during the summer months.

Abbe Hensley thanked the tri-leads for their work and acknowledged the steps it took to get to this place. She asked Commissioner Crum that since the work of this workgroup and the bifurcation of the department seem to be happening at the same time, how will this new consolidated model of early childhood programming fit within with the work on the bifurcation? There has been some concern that people who are not receiving public assistance and yet are consumers of child care are not formally engaged. Child care is more than just about people who receive public assistance. Commissioner Crum felt that is a conversation for legislators. The Child Care Program Office is under his purview, and at the governmental level, there is not a lot of framework around addressing the child care side. He noted that the executive order bifurcating the department itself doesn't write law; it just simply changes the functionality aspect. It can't make any substantive changes, which is why there were a couple items that Legislative Legal pointed out that the Department of Law and Legislative Legal are working to fix in the executive order.

Commissioner Crum went on to further explain that Public Assistance could be considered a Medicaid agency because of the eligibility, so Public Assistance, Behavioral Health, Senior and Disabilities Services, Health Care Services, and Public Health will stay under the Department of Health. One of the things the department is looking at internally is seeing how the groups they have in Public Health can integrate together a little bit more.

Commissioner Crum stated that this is step one in the process. A consolidated, robust, well-defined process of a child care system will never exist or enter into the conversation until they can do step one of making a restructure occur. The department is actively pursuing the restructure and continuing to have public meetings and engagement, but it's more difficult for people to attend meetings in the summer months. He thanked Trevor Storrs for the opportunity to set up a public forum through the Alaska Children's Trust. If anyone has questions or items pertinent to groups that want to be engaged in the process, Commissioner Crum will put himself and his leadership team together to address those concerns. Questions and comments can be sent to DHSSreorg@alaska.gov.

NEW BUSINESS

Emily Urlacher and Kristen Spencer offered time on the agenda for Council members to share programmatic updates.

Abbe Hensley shared that Best Beginnings is providing some virtual camps called Little Learners for children ages 2 to 5. Through a grant from the Rasmuson Foundation, they are able to offer scholarships. People interested can go to Little Learners on the Best Beginnings website.

Stephanie Berglund shared that thread is continuing to host the COVID-19 Resource Center on their website. If there is any news or information members would like to host there, please send that information to Stephanie Berglund.

Stephanie also announced that they will be hosting the bi-annual Early Childhood Economic Impact Summit virtually this fall. She will send the Council information as it becomes available. They will have a half-day event to provide the latest updates on what has been happening in the sector with families and the marketplace as well as some supply and demand information relative to child care. They will also be leading a conversation about innovative ideas on building a stronger child care system.

Maureen Harwood reported that the Part C program in Senior and Disabilities Services is called out within the ARPA law in the amount of \$1.2M plus. They will be hosting some family meetings along with the Interagency Coordinating Council to look at how Part C dollars can be spent. They will be looking for innovative program ideas, particularly in the area of CAPTA referrals for babies birth to 3 who have substantiated instances of harm. These are often the hardest families to follow, and sometimes they can't get enrolled or are ineligible. They are also looking at some innovative dollars from other places such as the Baby Court in Anchorage and other good ideas that are out there.

FINAL COMMENTS

Commissioner Crum stated that they will need to coordinate a way to engage between now and the next meeting, which is still to be determined, to determine what they are doing for the programmatic aspect as it relates to the legislature. They have a little bit of time to think about this before the legislature reconvenes. He suggested they should be looking at what holes the system has and which ones are the most necessary; things that could potentially be forwarded to either the Governor or perhaps to an advocate in the legislature. This is a topic the department will need a lot of input on.

Commissioner Johnson thanked Emily Urlacher and Kristen Spencer for all the work they do for these meetings. If Council members have questions about how to connect with their local school districts, they can contact him directly, and he will help them make those connections.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Crum and Commissioner Johnson thanked members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 3:40 p.m.