

**Alaska Early Childhood Coordinating Council (AECCC)**

*Videoconference*

**Meeting Date**

Monday, June 13, 2022

***Minutes***

**Members:**

Commissioner Adam Crum  
Commissioner Michael Johnson  
Amber Vaska  
Abbe Hensley  
Anne Shade  
Bev Schoonover  
Bridget Weiss  
Christina Hulquist  
Jennifer Weisshaupt  
Dr. Matthew Hirschfeld  
Joshua Arvidson  
Susan Keeler  
Stephanie Berglund  
Supanika Ordoñez

**Guests:**

Betsy Larson  
Chelsea Burke  
Donald Enoch  
Emily Ferry  
Heather Carpenter  
Jimael Johnson  
Kathy Berry  
Lacey Sanders  
Mary Middleton  
Meghan Johnson  
Rebekah Morisse  
Stefanie O'Brien  
Susan McKenzie

**Staff:**

Kristen Spencer, DEED  
Emily Urlacher, DHSS

***CALL TO ORDER – 1:00 P.M.***

***WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS***

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

***APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES***

Anne Shade **MOVED** to approve the minutes from the last meeting, **SECONDED** by Supanika Ordoñez. Hearing no discussion nor objection, the motion **PASSED**.

***APPROVAL OF AGENDA***

Anne Shade **MOVED** to approve the agenda, **SECONDED** by Abbe Hensley. Hearing no discussion nor objection, the motion **PASSED**.

***THE SHARED VISION PROJECT***

Mary Middleton, executive director of Stone Soup Group, gave a presentation on the Shared Vision, a collaborative work that started in 2016 with the Mental Health Trust and the Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities. In the beginning, the group focused mainly on adults with developmental disabilities but has grown to include younger children and families and early intervention. The original vision statement stressed the creation of a flexible system where each person works toward a meaningful life in their home, job, and community. The current statement is, “I live the life I choose with the support I direct.” The person receiving support services is the person who is making the choices about their own care and education. Participants in the Shared Vision include service providers, schools, family members, and individuals who experience disabilities.

A video was created that focused on the transition out of high school for students with disabilities and their teachers. A video was shown to the group regarding early childhood educators who had students exiting ILP and entering preschool.

***DHSS REORGANIZATION UPDATES***

Commissioner Crum explained that as of July 1, 2022, the Department of Health and Social Services will be split into the following two departments:

Department of Health will have these divisions:

- Medicaid
- Senior and Disabilities Services
- Health Care Services
- Behavioral Health
- Public Assistance and Public health (payment, process, and programs)

Department of Family and Community Services will focus on the following:

- Direct care provided 24/7 in the facility or community such as
  - Alaska Psychiatric Institute
  - Office of Children’s Services
  - Juvenile Justice
  - Pioneer Homes

Commissioner Crum will continue as the commissioner for the Department of Health. A commissioner for the Department of Family and Community Services has not been appointed as of the time of this meeting.

A lot of work has been accomplished behind the scenes to be able to apply for grants, draw down federal receipts, get computer programs updated and moved between departments, and following up with many groups so everyone understands the changes. Two new logos were also created for the new departments. Staff will have bump rights to move from one department to another for a full year. The reorganization page is continually being updated, including a biweekly newsletter, at <https://www.dhss.alaska.gov>.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY ORDER**

The state public health emergency order will end on July 1st, but there will be no change to Medicaid or any of the healthcare-related items. The emergency allotment (EA) SNAP benefit allows for higher SNAP benefits with broader eligibility criteria. The EA SNAP benefits will go out to beneficiaries throughout the end of August. The Pandemic-EBT program is tied to the federal public health emergency, and that will continue as well. Also, there is extra money from ARPA to go toward the LIHEAP (Low Income Heating Energy Assistance Program), which will go primarily to residents in rural Alaska.

### **EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS UPDATE**

Director McKenzie announced that last year, the Head Start program instituted a new assessment procedure, but after lengthy discussions, surveys, and feedback, the prior assessment, Teaching Strategies GOLD, will be implemented for Head Start and pre-K assessments beginning this fall.

There is free LETRS training available for preschool teachers through Region 16 Comprehensive Center. It starts in September and is a four-month commitment, and anyone who is interested in that training should let Director McKenzie or Supanika Ordoñez know.

The Alaska Science of Reading Symposium is scheduled for April 27 – 30, 2023 in Anchorage. This was announced so the dates can be set aside in calendars, and more information about this symposium will be coming out later.

With the passage of the Reads Act, teacher training and standards updates are in the planning stage.

## **HEAD START COLLABORATION GRANT APPLICATION 2022-2027**

Supanika Ordoñez outlined the grant application which will be submitted starting July 1st. The budget for the grant is \$625,000 over five years, or an annual budget of \$125,000, most of which is personnel costs. Travel costs include two mandatory trips for the annual collaboration office meeting, a mandatory trip to the Region 10 meeting in Seattle, and two face-to-face Head Start Association meetings. A virtual assistant is also included to help with meeting coordination and an awards ceremony.

This grant application process began last November and included feedback sessions, surveys incorporating the information received during the feedback sessions, and four work sessions to review and finalize the draft narrative. There are five national priorities, and some of the activities within each of the different priorities are as follows:

1. Partner with state child care systems, emphasizing the Early Head Start – Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnership Initiatives. Proposed activities include creating an MOU with the Child Care Program Office, collecting baseline numbers and mapping where Early Head Start is available, promoting federal funding opportunities to existing programs, and eliminating barriers for unlicensed Head Start programs to become licensed.
2. Work with state efforts to collect data regarding early childhood programs and child outcomes. Proposed activities include working closely with Alaska Head Start Association data committee to define the Head Start child, working with DEED’s data team on an AKSID linking project for long-term child assessment data, and working on outreach and data collection on child screening within the state.
3. Support the expansion and access of high quality workforce and career development opportunities for staff. Proposed activities for this priority include baseline data collection on early childhood workforce, building connections with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, promoting the statewide early childhood career technical education program, creating a statewide professional development calendar for early childhood educators, and working with SEED to develop a tool that is beneficial to Head Start programs.
4. Collaboration with State Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS). Proposed activities include working with Learn & Grow to eliminate duplicate reporting requirements, encouraging voluntary enrollment, and highlighting how Learn & Grow quality standards align with Head Start’s federal performance standards.
5. Work with state school systems to ensure continuity between Head Start and the Kindergarten Entrance Assessment (KEA). Proposed activities here include ensuring that Head Start staff have access to high-quality professional development opportunities accessible to school districts and creating an MOU template for use when facilitating collaborative relationships.

Head Start identified two regional priorities, and proposed activities under those are (1) to try to get background checks finished in a more timely manner, and (2) ensuring more collaboration between the national Alaska Native / American Indian office and the state collaboration office.

The grant cycle begins on October 1, 2022, and Supanika detailed the steps to be taken during the annual process including determination of priorities, progress reports, work sessions, and annual budget and narratives.

In response to questions posed by Abbe Hensley and Anne Shade regarding collaboration between the school districts and Head Start, Commissioner McKenzie stated that although exact plans are not in place, there will need to be a lot of collaboration and discussions.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD GOVERNANCE TASK FORCE UPDATE**

Christina Hulquist reported that in September of 2020, the statewide early childhood strategic direction was finalized and then adopted by AECCC in March 2021. A specific strategy under goal 3 of the plan was that Alaska's children and families be supported by a functional, comprehensive, mixed-delivery early childhood system. The goal of the task force is to develop recommendations and a proposal for a new governance design so that the early childhood 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 task force did a literature review of Alaska's data and recent reports, identified what challenges there were with governance as a strategy, met with a panel of other states that had undergone a governance change, and conducted a matrix of different types of boards that currently exist in Alaska.

The task force reached agreement on a draft proposal, a consolidated move for early childhood programs with an external board. It is a reputable governance model that exists in states across the nation and could be replicated for Alaska. The public sector part of this work is a new division that would bring together specific early childhood programs, and the private sector component would be a board.

The process is now in the outreach and engagement phase, gathering questions and feedback on the draft proposal. Denali Daniels & Associates has been hired as an engagement coordinator for this portion of the project.

Jimael Johnson explained the four goals of the outreach plan:

1. Increase dialogue, which will continue through the entire process.
2. Raise awareness and solicit feedback by informing audiences on the history and the need for a governance change in order to have a more centralized way of organizing around early childhood system components.
3. Conduct a formal campaign to encourage change.
4. Inform audiences on what to expect next as the task force finalizes a proposal for governance change.

Five roundtables were conducted in May to collect input on the early childhood programs and services that exist now and talk about what things could look like. About 90 people with a broad range of perspectives took part in the roundtables.

The next steps are to analyze and interpret the data and share the information with the task force. Many states have already looked at governance change for early childhood, and it takes from two to eight years to complete the process.

Bev Schoonover asked if the private board would be made up of people from other state agencies or if it would be more of a private type of representation. Jimael Johnson replied that it would be mainly a private partnership, and any state agency representatives would be nonvoting members. Christina Hulquist added that this question and many others are on the website on the governance tab in an FAQ document. The private board would consist of stakeholders and officials, such as private childcare and early childhood program providers, healthcare providers, tribal representatives, and commissioners or designees from several departments.

### **ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST AUTHORITY BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Jimael Johnson explained that the Mental Health Trust has a statutory obligation to work on its budget on a two-year cycle. The beneficiaries of the Trust include groups of Alaskans with mental illness, developmental disabilities, chronic alcohol or drug addiction, Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and traumatic brain injuries. Also included are people at risk of becoming beneficiaries, and prevention and early intervention in early childhood is a key opportunity to address that.

The Trust and the Department of Health and Social Services are required to have a Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Plan, which was renewed two years ago. There are nine goals in the Plan, and Jimael discussed the following goals:

- Goal No. 1 (Early Childhood): Programs serving young children promote resiliency, prevent and address trauma, and provide access to early intervention services. There are three objectives under this goal:
  - Promote universal screening efforts and early intervention services.
  - Provide support to ensure accurate identification and treatment of social-emotional needs for children and their caregivers.
  - Reduce the instances and impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
  
- Goal No. 6 (Protecting Vulnerable Alaskans): Alaskans are free from abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and exploitation. The two objectives under this goal are:
  - Prevent child maltreatment by ensuring resilient families.
  - Promote early intervention in maltreatment and with families at risk for maltreatment.

There are four primary focus areas:

1. Disability Justice, which are Trust beneficiaries that are engaged in the Corrections or Juvenile Justice systems.
2. Mental Health and Addiction Intervention includes the focus on behavioral health crisis response.

3. Beneficiary Employment and Engagement in community is key to recovery for people with disabilities.
4. Housing and Home and Community-Based Services is a safety net service as well as making sure that people are able to stay in their homes and communities as much as possible.

Current and future efforts include the contract with Denali Daniels regarding the early childhood system governance work and the screening and assessment work with Help Me Grow and the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership. The Trust is going to help fund the new version of the Ages & Stages Questionnaire-4, which is the developmental screening tool used by the state. The integration of behavioral health into primary care, the Partner Access Line Pediatric Alaska, also known as PAL PAK, to provide telepsychiatric consultation for pediatric practices in Alaska, is partially funded by the Trust. A lot of work is being done for trauma-engaged practice in behavioral health and education settings such as pre-K and early care and learning and Early Intervention/ILP programs.

Other efforts include infant and early childhood mental health capacity building and Project Compass, the family services treatment center, and child parent psychotherapy, which is a specific evidence-based practice. Starting next month will be enhanced home visiting services, which will allow agencies to hire staff that will have more flexibility to do more outreach for at-risk families. For data development and evaluation, the Trust has worked with the All Alaska Pediatric Partnership and the ALCAN Link project.

Jimael asked for input from the group and posted six questions for them to think about and respond to in terms of early childhood and family needs to consider for Trust investments during the next budget cycle. Susan Kessler pointed out that there is a huge disparity in community-based resources in a lot of rural communities, and she said it would be a great help if there was more help there, even a small amount for a community member to run a playgroup or small parent activity group.

Christina Hulquist said that they look to groups like this for fresh ideas and encouraged everyone to bring suggestions to the table. Anne Shade commented that services are disjointed and often unavailable, and the counseling centers do not see anyone under the age of 5, so she is encouraged that these things are being discussed. Dr. Matthew Hirschfeld stated that rural communities do not have therapy services for kids, and if the Trust can do anything to help solve that, it would be helpful.

Commissioner Crum wanted the group to know that there will be meetings with the Alaska Behavioral Health Association, ASHNHA, and the Mental Health Trust regarding workforce development items to pursue. He also asked the group to think about and give feedback on how to prevent institutionalizations and if there are projects that need formal evaluation to be replicated.

### **AECCC CHARTER DRAFT PROPOSAL**

Emily Urlacher explained that the strategic direction is the AECCC guiding document, and they were asked to combine the strategic direction, bylaws, and subcommittee documents to create a charter. When they reviewed the draft charter with the commissioners, it was evident that it needed more work before being submitted to the membership. Emily hopes that by the next quarterly meeting, she will have a draft charter out to the members to review and then consider at the fall meeting.

### **PROGRAM UPDATES OR NEW BUSINESS**

Christina Hulquist gave an update on Alaska's childcare relief funds received through three funding streams. Of the \$95 million received, about 60 percent has been obligated. Most was given to childcare programs and directly to childcare providers. Recipients also included OCS foster family support, sponsorships to different organizations, and scholarships for the early childhood workforce. Details are available on the Child Care Program Office website.

Bev Schoonover shared that the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council is updating its Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan with an emphasis on youth. The plan should be available for review and feedback by the fall meeting.

Emily Urlacher has added state management of the Parents As Teachers Home Visiting Program to her position and requested people contact her with questions about that program or home visiting in general.

Lacey Sanders mentioned that she and Heidi Teshner will be available to support the group in any way in the upcoming months.

Christina Hulquist requested that the members review and comment on the new draft of the emergency disaster plan that is out for public comment.

### **ADJOURN**

Commissioner Crum thanked everyone for attending and working together, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:07 p.m.