



## MEETING NOTES

### Region 49 Action Council Meeting

**Date & Time: Wednesday, January 4, 2023 – 1:30-3:00pm**

Council Members present: April Berthiaume, Danen Busch, Melissa Gravert, Janet Hill, Tess Hurt, Cindy Mahr, Lindsay Meeker, Tammy Muerhoff, Marcia Seabolt, Michael Terry, Lisa Williams

Council Members absent: Beverly Clark, Andrea Flannery, Kate Jennings, Marcy Mendenhall, James Richardson Jr., Tiera Teague

#### **Review Community Agreements & Introductions**

Notes: Action Council members reviewed Community Agreements.

#### **COVID-19 Impact on Region 49 ECEC Services**

Notes: Action Council discussed the positive and negative consequences of COVID-19 in ECEC structures.

- Created a fundamental shift in how things are done, how providers engage with families.
- Transition to remote/hybrid services and engagement.
- Teacher and staff awareness of health/illness risks, signs, promoting healthy hygiene.
- Impact on how Home Visiting Services being provided – door drop-offs, virtual interaction.
- Virtual support for children and families in navigating online learning.
- Recognizing and addressing needs of essential workers.
- Impact on mental health – isolation.
- Prioritizing ECEC teachers – promoting healthy boundaries, managing remote work, coping strategies, providing support from administration.
- Creative ways to maintain connections/relationships and interactions.
- Challenges with remote learning in ECEC, including local schools.
- Layoffs in community “hubs” (library, etc.).
- Mental health needs.
- Digital divide (access to technology and services).
- Navigating constant change in policies and recommendations from governing bodies.
- Administering wellness checks to families and children.



- Acknowledging and understanding survival vs. sustainability mode.
- Collaborative efforts to complete crisis management - solving problems, receiving additional funding.
- Greater awareness of inequities in systems.
- ECEC/Education students in higher ed had minimal or no in-class experience before entering field, challenges in acclimating into classrooms in person.
- Employers evaluating the practice and approach to the importance of child care to retain employees.
- Teachers leaving the workforce due to safety concerns.
- Reiterating the importance of collaborative relationships within the community.
- COVID-19 brought new chaos (reactive decisions) to existing chaos (funding streams).

### **Review of Previous Meetings**

Notes: Action Council members reviewed and summarized all Action Council meetings.

- Meeting 1: Introduced Birth to Five Illinois objectives and discussed the need for a system that was simpler, better, fairer.
- Meeting 2: Reimagined a new, equitable infrastructure.
- Meeting 3: Acknowledged the impact of collaborations working together.
- Meeting 4: Identified demographic areas of concern including poverty by neighborhood and lack of ECEC services in rural areas.
- Meeting 5: Explored the 66% slot gap rate – where are the children and who is caring for them?
- Meeting 6: Discussed priority populations that often overlap and long-term engagement strategies. Who ensures each family receives the services they need?

### **Ongoing Considerations**

- Streamlining is needed when engaging in ExceleRate quality rating process.
- Outdated information – data becomes irrelevant rather quickly; interested to learn mid- and post-COVID-19 data changes.
- Massive infant/toddler waitlist times, often longer than a child is in infancy or toddlerhood.
- Families who are on waitlists – who is caring for the children during these times?
- Recruitment and retention of the ECEC workforce is the leading problem.



### Quotes

- “I think what has to happen is an absolute, upside-down, fundamental shift in the way that ECEC is viewed and funded.”
- “The way we view ECEC as a community and as professionals versus the way we view K-12 education.”
- “I was told a waiting list for an infant was over two years long – that’s longer than the gestation of a human baby!”
- “Nobody is asking if there are enough slots to go to kindergarten. There’s no one on wait lists for first grade.”
- “Ask anybody on the street who is responsible for ensuring ECEC centers’ existence, most people would say it’s a private business. Ask the same person who is responsible for ensuring K-12, and they will say the State. That’s a fundamental problem.”

### **Next Meeting – VIRTUAL ONLY!**

Date/Time: **Tuesday, January 24, 2023 – 12:30-2:00PM**

Location: Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88486718868?pwd=TWREbUhkRDVhOGxvUkxhNHE1RCt5dz09>

*Reminder e-mail with Zoom link to come!*