

# Iowa Autism Council Meeting

## Final Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2022

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Meeting minutes taken by Beth Buehler-Sapp and Wendy Trotter

**Present:** Andrea Keith, Angela Burke Boston (zoom), Beth Buehler-Sapp, Betsy Lenzmeier, Caleb Primrose, Carrie Elser (zoom), Cheryl Mulligan (zoom), Connie Fanselow (zoom), Erika Hertel, Evelyn Horton, Matt O'Brien (zoom), Michelle Grant, Wendy Andersen, and Wendy Trotter.  
**Guest:** Ryan Hirl, Community Support Advocates

**Absent:** Michael Zehr, Blake Stephenson, Bill Kallestad, Nicholas Nopoulos

Caleb Primrose, Co-Chair, brought the meeting to order at 10:05 am. Council members introduced themselves. Council members reviewed the minutes from the November 10th meeting. Edits were suggested and made. Caleb Primrose made a motion to approve the minutes as edited, and Betsy Lenzmeier seconded the motion. A vote was taken by voting council members to approve the minutes as edited. Minutes approved.

### **Agency Updates:**

#### **Iowa Department of Education (DE):**

Wendy Trotter shared the following updates from the DE:

- **Autism Navigator for Early ACCESS providers:**
  - We are in our seventh year of this project.
  - Held the first Face-to-Face workshop for Cohort 7 on Thursday, Jan. 27.
  - Spring workshop will be led by our own Autism Navigator Team Leads on May 12<sup>th</sup>.
- **ACHIEVE:**
  - Iowa is launching a new IEP/IFSP system. Early ACCESS is going live with the new system on April 15, 2022. Then we are adding an initial cohort of districts in May and all districts by fall 2022.
- **Social-Emotional Engagement – Knowledge and Skills (SEE-KS):**
  - Washington Elementary in Mt. Vernon, IA is our pilot school.
    - Have had 3 coaching sessions over the course of the school year. Next session is scheduled for April 5 and the end of year celebration will be in May.
    - Participants continue to rave about the benefits of the project for both the students and teachers/staff.
  - Mississippi Bend is interested in coming on board for next school year. They are working to identify schools/districts who would like to participate.
  - Kreft Primary School in Council Bluffs is also joining the project next school year.
- **Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) K-6 Reading Comprehension Task Team:**
  - Work continues to build out our existing SDI K6 Literacy modules to include a concentrated focus on reading comprehension with considerations for neurodiverse learners (including Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD).

### **Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS):**

Andrea Keith shared the following updates from IVRS:

- Nothing really new to report. The autism huddles have been tabled for now due to low attendance. We're regrouping to figure out a how to get more people involved - trying to determine whether it was a timing/schedule issue, or whether it was the content. Hoping to figure out how to best meet the needs of our staff.

### **Regional Autism Assistance Program (RAP):**

Erika Hertel shared the following updates from RAP:

- Staffing Updates:
  - Have had some staff turnover.
  - Hired a Family Navigator for Des Moines – starts 3/21/22.
- The Autism Basics training series is starting again in April. Will continue to be led by Kelly Pelzel. There will be four weekly sessions held on Tuesdays at noon. The primary audience for these trainings are parents/caregivers of newly diagnosed children; however, are open to anyone. The sessions are approved for foster parent training credit. The sessions will be recorded, so if a family is not able to attend in person, they can still register and then they will be sent a link to the recording so they can watch when it is convenient for them.
- We held six Safety Care for Families trainings in five different locations across the state this last year. However, Marc Hines, the instructor, is no longer with the University of Iowa so we will have to pause these trainings until we find someone else that can lead them.
- Autism Learning Community through our HRSA grant will be having a webinar on March 30<sup>th</sup> from noon to 1:00pm. The topic is: Autism and Provider Visits – Easing Challenges for Patients, Families, and Providers. Will be a panel of several providers – one medical, one dental, and a parent.

### **Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) / Autism Support Program (ASP):**

Connie Fanselow provided the following updates for ASP:

- **Autism Support Program (ASP):**
  - Not much change related to ASP. There has been some discussion of adding/changing language related to programmatic changes for ASP in the appropriations bill, which is one of the last things to happen in the legislative session, so that is still a possibility.
  - The annual Autism Support Program report has gone out to the Governor and Legislators and been posted on the DHS website if anyone would like to take a look at it.

### **Additional Updates/Topics:**

Evelyn Horton shared:

- We're still working on the inclusion of registered behavior technicians (RBTs) as eligible direct service providers. It looks like we have the support of Director Liz Matney. We have been informed that there is a State Plan Amendment (SPA) being written, but as far as we know, that still hasn't gone through yet. However, if we can include RBTs as eligible direct service providers, that should help address the severe staff shortages we are experiencing in Iowa.
- We are still working to modify eligibility requirements for ASP so that more families can access those funds. We are not asking for more money, just modifications to allow the already allocated funds to

be used by families who could benefit from them. The lobbyist for Iowa ABA is encouraging families to contact Representative Fry and Senator Costello and share the need for these modifications.

- House file 2167 updates the definition of autism to fall under mental health. The bill defines autism spectrum disorder as “a mental health condition that meets the diagnostic criteria for such disorder as published in the most recent edition of the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders as published by the American psychiatric association”. This bill will allow individuals or families who are covered by Iowa regulated insurance plans to have the protection of federal mental health parity laws. In Iowa that means the age and dollar caps that are in the code will no longer be applied. They updated the definition because there are two conflicting definitions of autism in the Iowa code - one in the state employee benefit plan that defines autism as a behavioral health condition and the other in the insurance plan code section that defines autism as a medical condition. This bill updates both definitions to be consistent with current medical diagnosis and practice and eliminate that conflict.
- Autism Society of Iowa and Balance Autism are hosting the movie premiere, “In a Different Key”. It is the story of the first person ever diagnosed with autism who still lives in Forest, Mississippi and how his community really supported him. The idea is that you will go and take somebody who needs to learn more about how to support somebody with autism in their own community. It is by invitation only, but if you're wanting to go contact Balance Autism and ask for a ticket. It is being held March 24<sup>th</sup> at Prairie Meadows. The author will be in attendance and there will be a panel discussion following the movie.

Matt O'Brien shared:

- The University of Iowa is still waiting to hear about a couple of research grant applications, but everything else is status quo.

Caleb Primrose shared:

- Caleb Primrose, Matt O'Brien, Erica Hertel and Evelyn Horton participated in a Zoom meeting for Autism Acceptance Day on Jan 20, 2022. They had the opportunity to share with the legislators on the call information about the needs of the autism community as well as the role of the Autism Council and our identified priorities. They emphasized the importance of having a strong flow of information going to the legislators so they are best informed of the needs of the autism community. The information shared was positively received.

Wendy Andersen shared:

- Starting March 12<sup>th</sup> through the month of April, the Common Senses Festival will be happening in Omaha, NE. This is a month-long, city-wide festival where attendees can experience: interactive installations that engage the senses through visual art and technology; live performances for and from neurodiverse communities; and lectures and discussions on emerging research and inclusive practices. You can learn more at [www.CommonSensesFestival.com](http://www.CommonSensesFestival.com).

Wendy Trotter shared that three new members have been appointed by the Governor's office and they will begin at our June meeting.

There was discussion by the Council on how we can be more proactive in sharing our advice/expertise and identified priorities with those that could benefit from it. If we are to act as an Advisory Council for the Governor and Legislature, how do we ensure our “intended audience” is hearing what we have to share. Discussed intentionally inviting legislators, advocates, and other people of influence to our meetings.

Discussed trying to modify the structure of our meetings to not just be updates from everyone, but more intentional about moving priorities forward via presentations, guest-specific discussions, etc.

**Chair/Co-Chair Nomination and Vote:**

Caleb Primrose and Wendy Andersen expressed interest in serving as Chair and Co-Chair respectively. Michelle Grant (current Co-Chair) motioned to approve these nominations, Cheryl Mulligan seconded the motion. The Council voted and approved. Caleb Primrose will serve as Chair and Wendy Andersen will serve as Co-Chair beginning with the June 8, 2022 meeting.

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 8, 2022 from 10:00am – 3:00pm in Room B-50 in the Grimes State Office Building. Wendy will send out a meeting reminder.

Caleb Primrose made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Michelle Grant seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.