



## Iowa Council for Early ACCESS

February 7th, 2025  
9:00 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.  
Iowa Department of Education  
Grimes State Office Building, B50  
400 E. 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
[Agenda](#)

**Iowa Council for Early ACCESS Call to Order:** Eric Locke called the Iowa Council for Early ACCESS (ICEA) to order at 9:05 a.m., February 7, 2025 and introductions were made.

**Council Members Present In Person:** Kimberly Villotti

**Council Members Present Virtually:** Jess Burger, Karen Lauer, Erik Locke, Julie Watts, McKaylee Heuton, Peg Macek, John Bernat, Julie Jones, Karen Thompson, Michael Bergen, Gayle Murray

**Council Members Absent:** Annette Hyde, Shelley Horak, Micki Beard, Karen Lauer, Rozanne Warder

**Guests:** Katie Steffensmeier, Elissa Berding, Julie Sherbourne, Celeste Morvedt

**Early ACCESS Staff Present:** Dee Waddell, Meghan Miller (virtually), Abby Patterson, Tonya Krueger

**ACTION: Call to Order and Welcome Members and Guests**

**Approval of Minutes:**

Karen Thompson noted she was marked absent on the December ICEA minutes; she was in attendance for the meeting. These changes were noted. Eric Locke asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Julie Jones made a motion to approve and Michael Bergen seconded it. The minutes were approved.

**DISCUSSION: Family Story**

Eric Locke introduced Katie Steffensmeier to share her family story. Katie shared her family's story. Anthony was born three months early which led to many complex issues. Some of the issues Anthony experienced were iatrogenic adrenal insufficiency, Neutropenia, eye-related issues and other common symptoms of premature birth. While he was in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), he received physical and musical therapy. A Child Life Specialist brought toys and play mats, and they learned how to interact with him safely. Katie shared they had hoped to have Anthony home by his due date; however, he stayed in the NICU for seven months. She expressed her gratitude to the Ronald McDonald House for providing shuttles, stays and meals during this time so she was able to stay near her son.

When Anthony was eight months old, he was able to come home; however, he was immunocompromised. Katie was given handouts at the hospital with information about Early ACCESS, and the NICU staff referred Anthony to Early ACCESS. The AEA Early ACCESS services



began at 8 months old. The family and certified nurses watched him during the day due to child care complications regarding Anthony being on Oxygen. He was removed from oxygen when he was 1.5 years old.

The AEA Early ACCESS team provided the family with many invaluable services, and they benefited greatly by having them come to the house, especially due to concerns regarding Anthony's immune system. The AEA supported their family by providing direct, in-home early intervention services to discuss and achieve milestones. She praised the resources and tools the AEA provided, including his walker and the team's flexibility to work with her family and care providers. She also shared how much she enjoyed being able to text their Early ACCESS service coordinator to get updates on milestones in real time. Anthony is thriving and loves playing at the park and anything with wheels. The AEA was able to fill the needs that living in a rural area made challenging.

### **ACTION: Executive Committee Report: ICEA By-Laws**

#### ***Second Reading of [By-law Changes](#)***

Eric Locke noted the updated version of the by-laws were attached in the meeting agenda and asked the group to view them and see if any discussion was needed.

Jess Burger made a motion to approve the by-laws. It was seconded by Karen Thompson. The by-laws were approved unanimously. The by-laws will be posted on the Department of Education, Iowa Council for Early ACCESS web page.

### **ACTION: Early ACCESS APR & Data Review**

Annette Hyde joined the meeting at 10:10 am.

Dee Waddell shared a slide deck regarding the system of general supervision. She discussed the Early ACCESS vision which the council is striving to ensure any child with a developmental delay has support for both the child and family to allow the child to succeed. She also discussed the Early ACCESS Theory of Action composed of several elements. One of the elements is to ensure high-quality early intervention practices and confident caregivers. The Council is committed to making sure Early ACCESS has highly skilled early intervention staff. Another element is to sustain an infrastructure which will support a high-quality IDEA Part C system. She also discussed the five duties of general supervision; to inform constituents, prevent findings, correct noncompliance, detect the current status of early intervention services, and to inspect detected concerns at an intensity level commensurate to the concerns.

Dee also overviewed the Annual Performance Report (APR) for Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023 (2022-2023). It is being reviewed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). In April there will be a clarification period, and the state will receive the final OSEAP review and Iowa's Part C Determination Category in early summer. Iowa's Part C Determination Category for FFY 2022 was Meets Requirements.

Dee gave an overview of the Early Childhood Outcomes including; Positive Social Emotional Skills, Acquisition & Use of Knowledge & Skills, Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs.

The Council reviewed the data regarding each outcome and asked questions. Eric Locke asked if the data was granular enough to compare the different ages in different categories for each child.



Dee specified the data are able to be viewed at the child level from the time a child enters Early ACCESS until they exit Early ACCESS.

Dee also discussed Indicator 4 measurement: Family Outcomes; the percent of families participating in Part C (Early ACCESS) who report early intervention services have helped their family. Kimberly Villotti noted this is the indicator which reminds her of the quote “the family is the child’s first teacher” which is reinforced heavily through the Early ACCESS program.

Meghan Miller made the connection to Katie Steffenmeier’s family story and how the AEA did a wonderful job in providing support. Erick Locke noted the AEA Early ACCESS team was also incredibly flexible by changing their time of meetings to benefit the family. Peg Macek also noted how helpful it was for the AEA to be able to provide services in a rural area.

Annette Hyde took over as Chairperson of the meeting, and the Council took a break at 10:35 am.

### **DISCUSSION: One Agency’s Efforts - Connecting with the Community**

Annette introduced Julie Sherbourne from the Central Rivers AEA (CRAEA) to share a little bit about their Early ACCESS day. They focused on three main goals; engaging their community, team collaboration and sharing information from community sources. The purpose was to deliver support to families and to promote and encourage the best outcomes for young children. Some of their goals & objectives included; enhance community engagement & awareness, expand and strengthen partnerships, increase access to resources, disseminate early access information and team-building & connections. Their target audience was medical professionals, child care providers, local agencies and community centers. Their event schedule was as follows; August- planning, Mid-September- distribute folder to teams, October-Event Day. The event was promoted on social media, in community folders (brochures,hand-outs, business cards, flyers) and branded staff apparel. The AEA Early ACCESS staff believes this initiative strengthened their outreach and enhanced awareness about Early ACCESS.

Jess Burger asked if child care home providers were included in the outreach. Central Rivers AEA staff expressed that not many were included. Jess noted many child care home providers have questions about Early ACCESS and AEA services and suggested that CRAEA potentially include them in outreach for the next event.

### **DISCUSSION: Signatory Agency Updates**

#### ***Department of Education (DOE)***

Kimberly Villotti addressed a couple topics for awareness. One of which is the APR. The team was thrilled to have submitted it early. She thanked the Early ACCESS team and the ancillary support they received from everyone on the Council in doing so. She spoke about the new program allowing high school students to earn their CDA, in high school by partnering with the local child care centers.

Kimbelry also shared the Department is in the process of hiring new staff, including a Part C Data Manager and Part C CSPD consultant. The Department is closely watching the bills during the current legislative session, particularly in the Early Childhood area.



### ***Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)***

Meghan Miller noted their representative Micki Beard was not in attendance to give updates.

Abby Patterson, also from DHHS, updated the Council on the DHHS CAPTA's revisions. She explained that the DHHS brought a team together to brainstorm how to have more successful referrals. The group is getting together to review their comments, and she is hoping by next meeting to have their suggestions.

### ***Child Health Specialty Clinics (CHSC)***

Peg Macek shared she will be retiring from CHSC in June of this year. She will still be attending the last meeting. She also introduced John Bernat who will be applying for her position on the Council. She praised the Council's work and shared how helpful it has been for the children of Iowa.

### **DISCUSSION: Additional Announcements and updates**

#### **Council Member Updates**

Representative Michael Bergan shared updates from the current legislative session. He noted they are anticipating an early childhood related bill from the Governor's office. He also stated there's 750 bills currently being reviewed and could be upwards of 1,400 during this legislative session.

### **ACTION: Adjournment of ICEA Meeting**

Eric Locke motioned to adjourn. Jess Burger seconded the motion. Annette Hyde adjourned the meeting at 11:36 a.m.

The Executive Council Meeting began at 11:45 pm.