

Iowa Autism Council Meeting

Final Meeting Minutes – September 4, 2024

Meeting minutes taken by Beth Buehler-Sapp and Wendy Trotter

Present: Megan Abramski, Wendy Andersen, Beth Buehler-Sapp, Angela Burke Boston, Bill Carlson, Erika Hertel, Evelyn Horton, Andrea Keith, Rhonda Kortenkamp, Cheryl Mulligan, Wendy Trotter, Colin Wixted

Zoom: Carrie Elser

Absent: Michelle Grant, Carlyn Crowe

Caleb Primrose, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. Council members introduced themselves as we have a new member in attendance, Megan Abramski.

Council members reviewed the minutes from the June 26, 2024 meeting. Edits were suggested and made. Colin Wixted made a motion to approve the minutes as edited, and Cheryl Mulligan seconded the motion. Minutes approved.

Agency Updates:

Iowa Department of Education (DE):

Wendy Trotter reported the following updates:

- SEE-KS work will continue this year.
 - Washington Elementary in Mt Vernon has trained all staff and will be working on full building-wide implementation this year.
 - RCCBA (Roosevelt in Cedar Rapids) is continuing into this school year.
 - Glenwood School district had a PD day in July to introduce SEE-KS to additional staff. They will also be continuing this school year at West Elementary and the HS.
- The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) from the US Department of Education will be onsite here in Iowa September 9-13. OSEP is conducting monitoring visits for all states. Iowa is in cohort 2 which is happening this school year.

Regional Autism Assistance Program (RAP):

Erika Hertel shared the following updates from RAP:

- Registration has begun for the fall Autism Basics webinar series.
- RAP is working to manage an ever growing number of referrals. Strategies include ensuring families on the Family Navigators' caseloads actually meet the criteria, and focusing on serving families with the greatest need.

Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council):

Wendy Andersen shared the following updates from the DD Council:

- The DD Council is still in the process of identifying priorities for this next legislative session.

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS):

Andrea Keith reported the following updates from IVRS:

- There is no longer a waiting list, and they will not have a waiting list again.
- The new Director for IVRS is in the process of working with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to create two new roles: Counselor 1, which be a Bachelor's degree level position; and Counselor 2, which will be a Master's degree level position. These new positions should add capacity to IVRS to serve more individuals.

Iowa Health and Human Services (HHS) / Autism Support Program (ASP):

Megan Abramski reported the following updates:

- ASP (Autism Support Program) – All payments have been caught up as of mid-August.
- There have been 4-5 new applicants and all were approved with no denials.
- The cost share is still too high for some families. There is a hardship request form families can submit.
- Several new providers have expressed interest in participating.
- There is now a new email to be used when contacting HHS regarding the Autism Support Program. It is autismsupport@hhs.iowa.gov
- Approved services still cannot extend beyond 24 months at this time.

Other Agency/Organization Updates:

Evelyn Horton reported the following updates from Balance Autism:

- They are having issues with insurance companies requiring a doctor's recommendation for every six-month authorization before authorizing.
- The licensing board that was licensing behavior analysts was changed with the new legislated structure. Originally we were concerned that there would not be BCBA representation on the board, but we have since learned that there will be a BCBA representative on the board.

Cheryl Mulligan with Green Hills AEA reported that there has been a lot of restructuring at Green Hills AEA, and that there is no longer a formal CBAT team at the AEA. They have developed a whole child support team but that primarily supports tier 1 and tier 2 students.

Bill Carlson shared information regarding the impact that the new AEA legislation is having on schools. He stated that many schools rely on AEA's for professional learning and supports, but now to have AEA staff come in to support schools, it costs them about \$900 a day. The funding that the state said schools would save is not the reality. The actual result is that we are not getting the support we used to get and have to prioritize what we want to "spend our money on".

Caleb Primrose shared that the annual Autism Society of Iowa conference is on November 1st, 2024. Caleb will be attending and may serve on the adult panel discussion (this is not confirmed yet).

Legislative Report:

Council members reviewed the 2023 Legislative Report and identified 2024 priorities. Council discussed progress made on 2024 priorities:

- Autism Support Program (ASP) – there has been no progress made on this priority. Some Council members suspect that if Hawki begins to cover ABA services, that they may eliminate ASP. Council members also discussed suggesting that the 24 month limitation be removed for this year’s report.

Wendy Andersen asked if given the circumstances this year, if we should significantly simplify and streamline the report for this year?

Council members identified the following priorities and recommendations for this year’s report:

Priorities:

1. Keep this priority, but streamline the “asks”. Eliminate item “a” and keep item “b” (flexibility in benefit limits)
2. Remove priority two
3. Keep priority three regarding Hawki coverage of ABA services
4. Add a new priority regarding adults with autism and lifespan supports. Perhaps suggest an autism advisory committee within the DD Council.

Recommendations:

1. Keep support for RAP
2. Keep support for DD Council legislative priorities, but ask if they could add an autism specific priority
3. Keep support for the Strategic Plan with some rewording
4. Keep recommendation regarding adult services, but tweak to share concrete evidence of identified gaps and share a list of solutions

Further discussion regarding this year’s report:

- A suggestion was made to retile the document to reflect this being the last legislative report for the Autism Council.
- A suggestion was also made to include something about planning for the future for lowans with autism.
- Colin said perhaps this report should be even longer so we can get our thoughts, ideas, and full laundry list of everything the IAC has found and inform anyone who will hear before this is disbanded.
- Bill - How do we address the lack of support/services in rural places in Iowa. Employment, transportation, living supports are so limited in rural areas, so adults with autism have to move away from families to access what they need.
- Council member suggested: Perhaps we share, “Here’s what we have learned over the 16 years and here are the needs.”
 - What were the benefits of having the Council (e.g. collaboration, sharing of information, identifying needs, networking opportunities).
 - What are the gaps that will be left when Council is no more. Who is going to keep things updated?
- Evelyn – the benefit of the Council was identifying what was being done to move the strategic plan forward – we were all on the same page regarding what the focus was that needed to be addressed across the state.

- Another Council member suggested: Perhaps we title the report, “Conclusion Report of the Iowa Autism Council” – and then include what we have done, what gaps we have found, and recommendations of what needs to be addressed moving forward. There is still work to be done so we need to pass the torch to someone.
- Colin – suggested the following structure for the legislative report:
 - Section 1 – what the Council has accomplished
 - Section 2 – successor organizations
 - Section 3 – priorities and recommendations list
- Wendy A – Perhaps we organize the report into the following sections: History, accomplishments, benefits, problems in losing it.
 - History – begin with the history of the Council
 - Accomplishments – collected information about steps taken on strategic plan; advising legislators; forum with varying perspectives/viewpoints to identify issues and discuss solutions; served as a network between families, people with autism, providers, educators, etc. across the lifespan; emphasize the lifespan portion; BCBA educational grant;
 - Benefits – following the strategic plan we have been able to recognize what has been addressed and where more efforts needed to be made; broad mandate with a focus ONLY on autism
 - Problems losing – no representation for autistic adults – no lifespan focus

Future Planning Discussion:

Planning for future:

Wendy A – do we want to have conversations with agencies and organizations in future meetings? March and June could be focused on reaching out to groups/agencies?

Erika – we really need to discuss with DD Council what options there are with their Council (since Carlyn was not able to participate in this conversation today). Concerns that there is not a broad representation of agencies on the new special education council like there are on this Council – no VR representation, no provider representation, no AEA representation, etc. – just parents.

Wendy A stated that she will reach out the DD Council.

Priorities Advisory Committee – Wendy A will try to get this group together sometime soon.

Final Comments:

In closing the meeting, Caleb asked members, “What is one thing you are taking away from this Council – what is something you learned/liked/valued about serving on this Council?” Members shared responses.

Colin motioned to adjourn the meeting. Bill seconded the motion.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Next meetings:

- November 13, 2024 – *Grimes Bldg. Room B100*
- March 12, 2025 – *Grimes Bldg. Room B100*
- June 11, 2025 – *Grimes Bldg. Room B100*