



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Health and Social Services

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES
& SPECIAL EDUCATION

550 W 7th Ave. Suite 1230
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
Main: 907.269.8990
Toll-Free: 1.888.269.8990
Fax: 907.269.8995

January 18, 2022

Maureen Harwood
Program Manager, Part C Coordinator
Division of Senior and Disability Services
Department of Health and Social Services
751 Old Richardson Hwy, Suite 100a
Fairbanks, AK 99701-7802

Dear Ms. Harwood,

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education (the Council) is the State Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) for Alaska as required under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Council is composed of the members required under 34 CFR §303.60. Under state law, the Council has responsibilities to convene, facilitate with the subject-matter expertise, and administer the work of the ICC. This role includes providing oversight through a Council member as the ICC Chair and Council members as representatives of the ICC. The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) — as a Part C lead agency — is represented at the ICC through the Early Intervention/Infant Learning Program (EI/ILP), and the program regularly updates this advisory committee on its activities and raises issues of interest and concern. Additionally, EI/ILP is represented at the Council Early Intervention Committee (EIC) that works to create statewide systems of change that improve the lives of infants and toddlers experiencing developmental disabilities. And, quite a few of the EI/ILP regional provider agencies have seats on both ICC and EIC. The active engagement of the Part C Office and their partners with the statewide efforts that benefit our infants and toddlers with disabilities are highly appreciated.

We recognize that the EI/ILP System in Alaska has been impacted by the extended continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local Early Intervention Programs have successfully responded to the unique challenges of providing EI/ILP services in Alaska by expanding their capacity to deliver services by distance technology when in-person services have not been safe. However, this continues to be a major stressor to the EI/ILP system, impacting services to families, recruitment and retention of staff, and the well-being of EI/ILP Providers across the state. The relationship-based team model of Alaska's EI/ILP system has been a strength and support that has allowed the program to continue to successfully support the families of infants and toddlers with disabilities in Alaska.

Another major stressor to the EI/ILP System this year was the impact of the DHSS cyberattack, which created outages in the web based EI/ILP database, the GEMS Grant System and the EI/ILP and GCDSE websites. All processes normally managed in these two systems transitioned to alternative, local processes. This created additional work for both EI/ILP Unit staff and local EI/ILP Program staff. In addition, this outage has impacted the reporting of Federal indicator data. The data provided and reviewed for this report included data from the period July 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, with the exception of child count and exit related data.

Considering all the stressors of FFY20, we are pleased to see positive results from the Alaska EI/ILP system on its Indicator Data. Below are some highlights and discussion for FFY20.

Targets for indicators related to timely services, including Indicator 7 - enrollment in ILP services, Indicator 1 - starting ILP services outlined on the IFSP, and Indicators 8 a,b, and c - completing the steps of transition out of ILP services at age 3 were all met successfully.

Indicators related to improving children's developmental outcomes in three Child Outcome areas made significant gains this year, with an average of 3.82% increase. The accurate rating of these Child Outcomes has been a training emphasis in the EI/ILP system for the past 2 years, and it appears that these ratings have become more reliable. Based on this shift in capacity to complete accurate Child Outcome ratings, stakeholders, including the ICC, have worked with Alaska EI/ILP to establish new baselines for these indicators and new targets for the upcoming 5-year reporting period.

Family involvement indicators, which are gathered from the annual Family Outcome Survey, are an area we explored more closely this year. There was some slippage in results for the indicator related to family's abilities to effectively communicate their child's needs. On a positive note, response rates for the survey were high and were representative of diverse families from across the state of Alaska. Comments from families were largely positive, although there were mixed comments related to the delivery of services through telehealth. Some families liked this option, but many look forward to receiving in-person services. Moving forward it would be good to continue to work with the Center for Human Development regarding the survey design to ensure we fully understand family feedback in the areas related to the indicators.

The enrollment of children in the EI/ILP program decreased somewhat last year. There was a drop in enrollment of children age birth to 1 year. For children age birth to 3 years, there was decrease. The percentage of children age birth to three years enrolled in EI/ILP was lower than FFY19 but higher than FFY18. We suspect that COVID-19 was a factor in the identification, referral and enrollment of children age birth to 1 year and will monitor this indicator moving forward.

Alaska EI/ILP did not have any complaints filed by families and did not need to access mediation services or any other type of formal resolution procedures in FFY20.

The ICC will continue to work to be an informed, prepared stakeholder group and will help with identifying funding sources, feedback on strategies for improvement, and resource guidance. The ICC is honored by its role in contributing to and helping facilitate, the conversations and initiatives that lead to the early intervention system alignment and improvement.

The ICC looks forward to continuing collaboration in implementing these recommendations and are committed to supporting the program as it works through recent challenges related to long-distance service delivery. Please let us know if you have any questions about our comments or recommendations.

Sincerely,



Myranda Walso, Executive Director
Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education



Jena Crafton, Interagency Coordinating Council Chair
Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education