

SC Interagency Coordinating Council Meeting

January 21, 2026

10:00-12:00

SC School for the Deaf and the Blind

101 Executive Center Dr, Columbia, SC 29210

Meeting Participants:

Heather Googe, Laura McCraw, Eileen Beasley, Sherri Evans, Scott Falcone, Stephanie Donald, Sarah Edmunds, Elaine Gentry, Rebecca Hicklin, Erin Laughter

Online: Chana Sullivan, Gail Shelley, Brittany Corsell, Shawna McCafferty, Paige Fougrousse, Cindy Tomlinson, Joyce Kimrey, Melissa Curtis, Brianna Steed, Kristen Fazio, Katie Wilson, Jordan Lint, Hilary Harris, Tara Carroll, Stacey Fuller, Amy Ruddy, Anita Porter-Ellison, Sonya Lebrun, Erin Laughter, Anne Kinsman, Nhi Ngo, Raushawna Price, Jillian Franklin, Deneen Middleton, Karen Larson, Lucia Spencer, Nana Boateng, Birley Wright, Jennifer Horton, Trechia Canady-Bly, Michelle Chaff, Mary Britt Marsh, Jennifer Strock, Page Mangum, Sally Cannon, Brittany Zeller, Laura Tsuboi, Katrina Tompkins, Frances Stroman,

Meeting notes:

Public Comment:

- **Telehealth and Service Access in Rural Areas:** Rebecca Hicklin raised concerns about limited access to dietitian services for medically complex children in rural South Carolina, prompting Stephanie Donald and Eileen Beasley to discuss current Medicaid guidelines, telehealth restrictions, and upcoming updates to the BabyNet provider manual that may address these barriers.
 - **Service Coordination Challenges:** Stephanie Donald and Laura McCraw discussed the logistical difficulties faced by service coordinators in rural counties, including long travel times and high caseloads, which contribute to provider burnout and further limit service access.
 - **Public Comment and Stakeholder Engagement:** Stephanie Donald confirmed that any changes to BabyNet policies, including telehealth provisions, will be subject to public comment and hearings, ensuring that stakeholders can provide feedback before implementation.

- **Assistive Technology and Medicaid Reimbursement Issues:** Justin from Tri-State Medical Supplies raised concerns about inadequate Medicaid reimbursement for specialized pediatric durable medical equipment, leading Stephanie Donald to confirm that assistive technology will be addressed in the updated Medicaid manual and to propose further offline discussions to resolve payment and coverage gaps.
 - **South Carolina Assistive Technology Project:** Stephanie Donald announced increased collaboration with the South Carolina Assistive Technology Project to expand access to communication devices and other assistive technologies, with plans to update both Medicaid and BabyNet policies accordingly.
 - **Budget Constraints and Policy Review:** Eileen Beasley reminded participants of the program's budget and outlined the process for reviewing service costs.

Director's Report:

- **Annual Performance Report (APR) Data Review and Compliance:** Stephanie Donald presented the BabyNet Annual Performance Report, detailing compliance and results indicators, historical trends, and areas needing improvement, while engaging the ICC in discussions about setting future targets and addressing persistent challenges in timely service delivery and natural environment services.
 - **Compliance Indicators Overview:** Stephanie Donald explained the four compliance indicators—timely services, timely initial IFSPs, transition planning, and correction of non-compliance—highlighting improvements in timely services and the shift to a one-to-one ratio for reporting findings.
 - **Results Indicators and Child Outcomes:** Stephanie Donald described how child outcomes are measured using entry and exit ratings, with summary statements reflecting growth and age-level achievement; she noted that South Carolina's stricter eligibility criteria affect comparative results with other states.
 - **Family Outcomes Measurement:** Stephanie Donald reported a significant increase in family survey response rates and improved results, attributing this to enhanced engagement and more representative data on family experiences with Part C services.
 - **Natural Environment Services Decline:** Stephanie Donald and the ICC discussed a downward trend in services delivered in natural environments,

considering policy changes and provider enrollment criteria to address this issue in future meetings or subcommittees.

- **Next Steps and Stakeholder Input:** Stephanie Donald outlined upcoming actions, including setting new targets for compliance and results indicators, responding to OSEP feedback during the APR clarification period, and issuing local determinations to BabyNet districts.
- **Referral and Eligibility Processing Delays:** Stephanie Donald and ICC members analyzed data showing increased delays in processing referrals and initial IFSPs, identifying human resource limitations as the primary cause and discussing potential solutions such as process automation, inter-agency collaboration, and learning from other states' models.
 - **Referral Timeline Data:** Stephanie Donald presented data indicating that the average number of days from referral to initial IFSP has increased, with BabyNet eligibility now scheduling out five to six weeks, making it difficult to meet federal timelines.
 - **Resource and Capacity Issues:** Stephanie Donald and other members identified human resource shortages as the main factor behind processing delays, noting that referral rates have remained steady while staff capacity has not kept pace.
 - **Potential Solutions and Think Tank Proposal:** ICC members suggested forming think tank sessions and increasing collaboration with other agency teams to brainstorm strategies for improving referral and eligibility processing efficiency.
 - **Process Automation and Screening Tools:** Members discussed the possibility of automating parts of the eligibility process, such as using electronic evaluation tools like the DP4, but noted challenges with family engagement and the need for qualified staff to conduct interviews.
 - **Comparative State Models:** Stephanie Donald shared that South Carolina's split eligibility process is unique and that a subgroup is researching service delivery models from other states to identify best practices for streamlining referrals and eligibility.
- **Language Acquisition and Service Coordination for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children:** Scott Falcone and Tara Carroll raised concerns about insufficient referrals and language access for deaf and hard of hearing children, leading to

discussions about policy updates, provider education, and onboarding materials to ensure families make informed choices and receive specialized services.

- **Referral Gaps for Deaf/Hard of Hearing:** Scott Falcone highlighted that the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind is not receiving all eligible referrals, particularly for deaf and hard of hearing children, resulting in language delays that are difficult to remediate after transition to Part B services.
- **Provider Awareness and Family Choice:** Tara and Stephanie Donald discussed the influx of new early intervention providers who may not be aware of specialized services available, emphasizing the importance of ensuring families make informed decisions about concurrent service options.
- **Policy and Onboarding Recommendations:** The group proposed including guidelines in the BabyNet policy manual and service coordinator onboarding materials to require contact with specialized agencies when a child is diagnosed with deafness or vision impairment, ensuring consistent information and access to appropriate services.
- **Training and Curriculum Development:** Stephanie Donald confirmed that curriculum updates for service coordinator onboarding are underway, with plans to include materials on language acquisition and specialized service referral processes.
- **ICC Bylaws and Membership Updates:** Heather Googe and Stephanie Donald reviewed the draft ICC bylaws and discussed the process for finalizing and voting on them, as well as the ongoing recruitment and appointment of parent, provider, and agency representatives to ensure compliance and broad representation.
 - **Bylaws Review and Voting Plan:** Heather Googe explained that the ICC bylaws have been revised to align with IDEA and state laws, and that members will review the draft before voting in March to implement changes for the next fiscal year.
 - **Membership Recruitment and Representation:** Stephanie Donald described the process for soliciting applications from parents, providers, and agencies, emphasizing the need for geographic and disciplinary diversity, as well as compliance with requirements for parent representation and leadership.

- **Governor's Office Appointment Process:** Heather Googe outlined the steps for submitting recommended candidates to the governor's office, noting that agency representatives are typically approved without issue, while parent and provider appointments require careful vetting and follow-up.
 - **Executive Session Planning:** The ICC agreed to hold an executive session, either virtually or in person, to review applications and finalize recommendations for appointments, aiming to expedite the process and ensure timely representation.
- **Agency and Partner Updates:** Representatives from Family Connection, Office of Intellectual Developmental Disabilities, Department of Mental Health, Department of Public Health, and other agencies provided brief updates on recent activities, upcoming conferences, organizational changes, and ongoing initiatives relevant to early childhood services.
 - **Family Connection Activities:** Cindy from Family Connection announced the upcoming Hopes and Dreams Conference, shared information about developmental screenings, referrals, and parent support activities, and provided details on scholarship and speaker opportunities.
 - **OIDD Technical Assistance and Provider Approvals:** Joyce Kimrey reported on technical assistance provided to agencies, contract compliance reviews, new provider approvals, and ongoing reviews by the Department of Administration related to the OIDDDSNMHD merger.
 - **Department of Mental Health Restructuring:** Erin Laughter described recent organizational changes within the Office of Mental Health, including new reporting structures and upcoming hires for medical oversight and state facility management.
 - **Department of Public Health Announcements:** Tara shared that Camp Burnt Gin applications are open and provided a link to the schedule and application page.
- **Professional Development and Conference Planning:** Sherri Evans, Scott Falcone, and Heather Googe discussed upcoming conferences, professional development initiatives, and collaborative efforts to enhance early childhood and early intervention services, including plans for joint events and expanded training opportunities.

- **Early Intervention Conference Planning:** Scott Falcone described efforts to organize an early intervention conference in partnership with the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind, noting delays due to personal circumstances and venue availability, with plans to revisit scheduling for the next calendar year.
- **Champions for Young Children Symposium:** Heather Googe announced the merging of the Early Childhood Inclusion Conference and Champions for Young Children Symposium into a unified event, 'United for Every Child,' with expanded content for early intervention and special education professionals.
- **Professional Development Focus Areas:** Heather Googe highlighted ongoing work in professional development, including training on the pyramid model, transition processes, and collaborative partnerships across early childhood sectors, with calls for proposals and registration information shared.

Follow-up tasks:

- **Telehealth Policy for Rural Areas:** Research and propose options for including telehealth services in BabyNet policies and procedures to better serve medically complex children in rural areas during the upcoming manual update process.
- **Provider Qualifications for Medicaid Manual:** Reach out to Rebecca Hicklin for input on matching procedure codes with qualified providers and their qualifications for the Medicaid BabyNet manual update.
- **Guidance on Telehealth Service Coordination:** Provide guidance regarding the possibility of allowing service coordination under BabyNet to be done remotely, and include this in the manual updates.
- **Assistive Technology Payment Issues:** Follow up with Justin from Tri-State Medical Supplies to discuss DME equipment payment issues and explore solutions for covering specialized pediatric items under Medicaid/BabyNet.
- **Nutrition Counseling Billing Guidance:** Share information and guidance on billing for nutrition counseling telehealth visits for Medicaid BabyNet children, including use of AGT modifier and website resources.
- **BabyNet Provider Manual Update Report:** Prepare and present a report on internal work regarding provider manual updates and Medicaid/BabyNet policy changes at the next spring meeting.

- **Natural Environment Services Compliance:** Organize a subcommittee or meeting to address declining numbers in natural environment services and develop strategies to increase compliance with Part C requirements.
- **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Referrals:** Develop and include policy/procedure guidance in the BabyNet manual to ensure children diagnosed as deaf or hard of hearing are referred to SC School for the Deaf and Blind and receive appropriate language acquisition services.