



**University of Connecticut  
Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities  
Consumer Advisory Council**

March 26, 2024

Meeting Minutes

**In Attendance:**

Emily Ball  
Julie Ball  
Karen Carney  
Nicole Cossett  
Denise Drummond  
Walter Glomb

Diana LaRocco  
Allyson Powell  
Deb Richards  
Lolli Ross  
Mike Whilby  
Cristina Wilson

**UCEDD Faculty/Staff in Attendance:**

Mary Beth Bruder  
Darla Gundler  
Christine Jozef  
Tara Lutz  
Marney Pollack

Brian Reichow  
Laurie Singer  
Bethanne Vergean  
Toi Weatherspoon

**Introduction:**

Mary Beth Bruder began the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanked everyone for their support. She reflected that this is the first in person meeting since Covid and is happy to have the council members together in person again. She introduced Emily Ball, who is newly elected CAC Co-Chair. Emily then welcomed the group and asked everyone to introduce themselves and share their affiliation.

After the introductions of attendees, Mary Beth Bruder showed a PowerPoint presentation. She gave an overview of who we are, our requirements and what we have been able to leverage as resources. Our budget is 8 million dollars in grants. We have a cost share from the Dean of School of Medicine, which covers the key faculty and the LEND students and pays for the UCEDD facility. Our core funding is about \$568,000 a year and will be about the same next

year. Mary Beth reviewed the vision and the mission that was developed by the CAC members at the last meetings for the new UCEDD grant. The UCEDD mission is to generate, translate and disseminate interdisciplinary research, evaluation findings, and outcome-based practices through interdisciplinary preservice demonstrations to enable all CT residents with disabilities and their families to receive appropriate, individualized, and effective supports and services to enhance their quality of life. In plain language: The UConn UCEDD will train others, study what happens, provide services, and share important information to help people with disabilities and their families get the services and support that help them have a good life in the community. This PowerPoint presentation is available to everyone. If you would like a copy, please let us know.

**Participant updates/highlights:**

**Brian Reichow (Early Childhood Intervention):** Discussed two journals, Infants and Young Children which is edited by Mary Beth Bruder, and Journal of Early Intervention, edited by Brian Reichow. Mentioned the Society for Early Intervention is being housed at the UCEDD, and an international conference is being planned for 2025. Some current projects include helping Special Olympics International in the development an evaluation plan an app that the Special Olympics will be using to increase participation and Doctoral Leadership Training through OSEP that is funding scholars to obtain PhDs in Early Childhood Intervention at UConn.

**Bethanne Vergean (Early Childhood Intervention):** The CDC collaborated with the Academy of Pediatrics. These ambassadors met in Atlanta to discuss Pediatric residence. Talked about trainings that have been held to focus on screening and family engagement. The Connecticut Family Stars Demonstration Project: Currently partnering with the Office of Early Childhood to develop a system to track, monitor, and screen young children into early intervention. In the process of developing a Parent-to-Parent model, working with families to educate how important screening is. This program is funded by OSEP.

**Mary Beth Bruder (ECiPC-E):** Purpose of this program is to train Early Intervention Special Educators to understand what equity is and be able to provide equitable services. Given the task by the Office of Special Ed Programs to define what Equity means. This would include working with states on change of system, access, and participation of Early Childhood Intervention, culturally and linguistically, removal of structural barriers that deny infant and children accessibility, and the framework would be based on culture and the diversification of the workplace.

**Deb Richards and Laurie Singer (Aspiring Leaders and New Directors):** This program is modeled after a Cohort developed in Virginia to address the shortage of Special Education Directors. It was designed to fit Connecticut; and is currently now its 2<sup>nd</sup> Cohort and we are recruiting individuals for Cohort 3. Cohort 2 consists of 25 individuals participating and have full time jobs in the Special Education field with multiple disciplines. This program is competency-based with a combination of leadership, leading change, core results and operational

issues. It provides specific tools to take on challenges on how to interface with the Board of Education, how to balance a budget, how to write a grant, continuance of services and how to develop System Programs.

**Marney Pollack (School-Age Research):** Marney is working to build out the UCEDD's school-age research program focused on school-based multi-tiered systems of behavior support. This work aligns with the UCEDD mission by engaging LEND trainees and doctoral students in various parts of research; providing training and technical assistance in behavior support; collecting data on implementation and outcomes; and sharing findings at local, state, and national levels. The school-age research program will use a collaborative action research framework with embedded single case research design. Marney is working to establish partnerships with local schools and secure internal and external funding streams to support this work.

**Tara Lutz (Health Initiatives):** Through the Expanding Capacity of Public Health Workforce project, we have two areas of focus: MPH-granting programs in the state and local health departments. Mary Beth and Tara have been meeting with leadership from the 8 MPH programs in the state to provide training, TA, and resources to support embedding disability public health competencies into curriculum. Data from the last 3 annual reports submitted to DPH by all 59 directors of local health departments are currently being reviewed which will be followed by consultations, training and TA. Two doctoral student projects under this project: 1. report of graduate and undergraduate public health and related programs within CT IHEs for disability inclusion based on course title and description, and 2. report of MPH programs with a Maternal and Child Health track/specialization/certificate/other coursework for inclusion of disability and/or early child intervention by course title and description. The Certificate of Interdisciplinary Disability Studies in Public Health is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year. Almost 400 students have taken at least one course; 20 have earned the 4-course Certificate, 5 more will earn it at the end of spring semester. Since January 2024 there have been 15 inquiries. The UCEDD is working collaboratively with DPH and ADS to finalize a checklist of best practices for health care providers to work with persons with disabilities. The checklist includes feedback from disability advocates and provider organizations that have been meeting monthly since 2021 to advocate for accessible medical diagnostic equipment.

**Darla Gundler (Early Childhood):** CT Leadership Cohort currently in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cohort with this program in partnership with Office of Early Childhood. This is a competency-based program and capstones need to be presented at the end. Has been challenging getting more preschool staff involved, so we are looking for ways to get the word out to their colleagues on how beneficial this program is.

**Mary Beth Bruder (Masters Concentration):** This program is coming to an end with 45 Graduates. Four courses funded by the UCEDD which trained Social Workers, Early Childhood Special Educators, and Speech/Language Pathologists as a part of their master's programs. This is an interdisciplinary course with 3 core values: Family, Assessment, Intervention.

**Bethanne Vergean (Community College):** Just finished the first five years of the grant which focused on the associate degree level for Early Childhood Education. Old syllabi's have been updated to include children with Special Needs, equity, and inclusion. Recently awarded another five years. Received exciting news about putting Early Childhood Education courses into the University of Hartford transition program Hilyer College.

**Mary Beth Bruder (LEND):** The Connecticut Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) class is held at the UCEDD every Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm during the academic year. The UConn Health Dean agreed to fully fund these Graduate Students, which freed up money to support staff and families. The students recently attended a Legislative Day where they participated in the process at the L.O.B in Hartford.

**Cristina Wilson (Doctoral Program):** The Early Childhood Intervention Doctoral Consortium (ECiDC) is federally funded by the Office of Special Education to increase the number of students in PhD programs that are interested in studying and learning about Early Childhood Special Education. This five-year grant is an intensive focus, which is collaborated with Higher Education across the country to recruit students to eventually become faculty to continue training in this type of program. This would include Community Engagement/Service, working with different faculty and attending conferences, and Core Curriculum which includes modules and projects. There are currently 21 scholars from nine different universities. We have submitted a new grant to continue this program and are expected to hear in last spring if we are awarded the grant.

**Darla Gundler (ECPC):** The Early Childhood Personnel Center (ECPC) has worked with so many faculty members who then, in turn, revised their syllabus and used our website to do so, in which they helped us develop. Always involve families when we do these cohorts and are trained to use their stories to teach to the EI/ECSE Standards. ECPC helped with the DEC through CEC professional standards in Early Intervention/ Early Childhood Special Education.

**Darla Gundler (ECiPC-Equity):** Partnered with AUCD to recruit LEND-ECI Equity champions to develop a systems change capstone focused on early childhood and equity. Also partnered with AACTE to recruit HOLMES scholars focused on early childhood special education who represent diversity, there are 11 scholars across 9 different Universities. This is year one, we have three more years with the HOLMES scholars.

**Brian Reichow (Research and Evaluation):** Brian discussed AUCD's National Information Reporting System (NIRS) process and regulations. A NIRS report from the UConn UCEDD (and other UCEDDs) goes to Congress every year and indicates what was done and tracks every project and function. It is useful for the UCEDD as well since it shows where we are doing well and where we need to increase activities. We are responsible for completing Annual Performance Reports for our funded projects. All funded projects get these annual reports to show progress we are making to achieve the objectives of each project.

**Mike Whilby (Disability Rights Connecticut)**: Talked about his agencies Educational Rights Clinic which is open to students with disabilities that need help with the 504 plans. Staff attorneys, advocates, and law students available in person and virtually. Discussed supporting Decision Clinic with attorneys and advocates create a plan for the student. Lastly discussed the findings during an investigation that occurred at High Roads School. Shared the full report and press release. This information is located on his website: [www.disrightsct.org](http://www.disrightsct.org)

**Walter Glomb (Council on Developmental Disabilities)**: Council has 20 projects going on but he only addressed a few. Technology Conference is scheduled for May 6-7 at the Omni Hotel in Downtown New Haven, CT. Looking to attract a wider (Urban) demographic. Registration can be waived for anyone from those communities. Tool guide has been developed for Disability services, target is for black and brown people to participate in this tool guide so they can benefit from accommodations offered. Yale is running a community discussion and is advocating for the urban demographic. Council would like to hear feedback on how we can reach more of these communities. Also, mentioned that council is developing a positive relationship with town managers to work on health care accommodations and what do these accommodations look like for people with Developmental Disabilities.

**UCEDD Updates – Ongoing Projects and Staff News:**

1. Mary Beth Bruder was recognized in San Antonio, TX by the Council for Exceptional Children with the CEC Special Education Lifetime Achievement Award!
2. Marney Pollack is the new Director of Training in Education!

**Next Steps:**

The next CAC meeting Fall of 2024.

Meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Toi J. Weatherspoon  
University of Connecticut Health Center  
Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities