

Office of the Child Advocate  
Childhood Trauma Task Force Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 2, 2023

1:00pm-3:00pm

Meeting held virtually

**Task Force Members or Designees Present:**

Andrea Oliveria (DMH)  
Dawn Christie (PPAL)  
Shawna Boles (DYS)  
Laura Brody (DCF)  
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)  
Claudia Dunne (CPCS)  
Kate Lowenstein (CfJJ)

**OCA Staff:**

Melissa Threadgill  
Alix Rivière  
Bekah Thomas  
Arianna Turner

**Other:**

Chris Pond (DESE)  
John Crocker (Methuen PS)  
Audrey Smolkin (OCA)  
Donna Traynham (DESE)  
Laura Cinelli (Rennie Center)  
Amy Whitehead-Pleaux (EEC)  
Kelly English (MSPCC)  
Carmel Craig (ABH)  
Amanda Chung (Rennie Center)  
Courteny Chelo (MSPCC)  
Danya Tribuna  
Paul Hyry-Dermith (bryt)  
Katherine Hughes  
Carisa Pajak (OBH)  
Jennifer Urff  
Madi Wachman (MassHealth)  
Andrea Parker (FCSN)

Krysta Parrell (Family Aid)

Rayna Hill

Avery Brien (DPH)

Kathleen Bitetti (OSA)

**Meeting Commenced:** 1:01pm

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Ms. Threadgill welcomed the attendees to the Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF) meeting. CTTF members and guests introduced themselves.

### **Review and Approval of Minutes from August 7, 2023 Meeting**

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the August 7, 2023, meeting minutes. Dawn Christie, Shawna Boles, Andrea Goncalves Oliviera, and Laura Brody voted in the affirmative. Rachel Wallack abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes for August were approved.

### **OCA Update**

Ms. Threadgill shared that the Center on Child Wellbeing & Trauma (CCWT) will be moving from ForHealth Consulting at UMass to the OCA. She welcomed questions about this transition, and none were raised.

Ms. Threadgill reminded participants about the next meeting on December 4 during which the annual report will be voted on and welcomed questions. None were raised.

### **Update on CTTF Work Plan 2023**

Ms. Rivière provided an update on the 2023 work plan. Ms. Rivière welcomed questions and suggestions.

Members discussed the licensing of educators and how to address the need for individualized approaches to address the various types and levels of trauma. It was explained that the group is at the beginning of this process and is using a broad definition of trauma. It was also explained that the current focus is less on helping this group develop a provider directory and more on thinking about what the structures and systems in state government are for tracking these things and if there are gaps, as well as how to identify and fill them.

Members discussed the challenges of helping children who are nonverbal.

It was explained that the current work will identify what if anything is required by the state of professionals who work in various child-serving sectors and how detailed the requirements are. It was explained that after those questions are answered, the next step will be to think about gaps in training.

### **Presentations on Trauma Supports in K-12**

Ms. Threadgill welcomed Ms. Rivière to introduce the guests and their presentation topics.

Ms. Traynham and Ms. Pond, from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Office of Student and Family Support, presented on the following:

- Safe and Supportive Schools
- Supporting Students' Social Emotional Learning, Behavioral and Mental Health, and Wellness
- Massachusetts Rethinking Discipline Initiative

Ms. Threadgill welcomed questions.

Members discussed alternatives to suspension and asked who at DESE oversees the process by which school principals deem whether alternatives are appropriate. Members also asked who is responsible for ensuring that students and families are aware of alternatives. Ms. Traynham shared that the Problem Resolution Team at DESE responsible for implementation; if there are concerns about implementation, calls will go to that team for review.

Members discussed the difficulties that families face when they cannot secure IEPs or when their child's IEPs do not address all of the student's needs and how this can lead to students struggling with behavior. Members discussed how this issue often falls along racial and economic lines, as schools sometimes lack the funding for a complete IEP. Members asked if DESE is looking into the lack of a sufficient IEP as a factor in suspensions.

Ms. Traynham shared that special education programs have similar federal indicators that they have to report to the federal government about students with disabilities and discipline. She shared that she was unsure whether DESE has examined the data about students who have undergone the IEP evaluation process, been deemed ineligible, and are subsequently suspended. Ms. Traynham expressed a willingness to learn more about this issue and data.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed Ms. Cinelli to present.

Ms. Cinelli, Ms. Chung, Mr. Hyry-Dermith, and Mr. Crocker from Thriving Minds presented on the following:

- Thriving Mind's TTA work

- The bryt program
- Challenges to school implementation of trauma supports and policy recommendations

Ms. Threadgill thanked presenters for their work and welcomed questions.

Ms. Threadgill asked about what specific barriers schools are facing to implement behavioral health and trauma supports, and what the team has found to be successful in schools who are implementing these programs.

Mr. Crocker shared that ensuring that there is buy-in is essential, as well as ensuring that there is time and energy to invest, and that programs run better when there is full buy-in. Mr. Hry-Dermith added that when it is unclear who is taking ownership and responsibility for implementation in the long run, it is difficult to start a sustainable program. He shared that the best way to do that is to integrate tenets of the program into every aspect of the school system, not have them exist in a silo.

Ms. Rivière asked presenters from DESE's Office of Student and Family Support for further discussion of the youth mental health first aid program. Ms. Pond shared that this program is about teachers learning about warning signs in youth ages 6-18 with mental health and substance use challenges; this helps them work with support staff to get the students the services they may need. She added that this is a good way for teachers to learn more about mental health concerns generally.

Ms. Rivière asked if the bryt program collaborates with state agencies that work with children with similar behavioral health needs, such as DCF, DYS, or the Courts. Mr. Hry-Dermith shared that traditionally, bryt has had schools as their main customers and has partnered secondarily with other organizations like state agencies. He also shared that there would be real value in collaboration with other organizations, perhaps through a team member who can partner with potential collaborators and make them aware of bryt. He explained bryt hopes to be able to expand staffing to fill this need in the future.

Ms. Threadgill noted the incredible work Thinking Minds has done in getting to so many schools, each year adding more as a result of consistent effort.

### **Closing Comments:**

Ms. Threadgill thanked the members and other attendees for their time and continued efforts.

**Adjournment:** 2:25 pm