Autism Commission Birth to Fourteen Years Old

Subcommittee Meeting

December 4, 2020 1:00pm-3:00pm

Via WebEx

Present on WebEx: Co-chairs Russell Johnston and Michele Brait, Joan Rafferty Butterfield, Michelle Poulin, Rob Polsinelli, Sarah Richmann, Shari King, Zac Houston, Beth Jersky, Dianne Lescinskas and Carolyn Kain.

Dr. Russell Johnston called the meeting to order and welcomed all members of the Birth to Fourteen Years Old subcommittee meeting. The subcommittee members present unanimously voted to approve the September meeting minutes.

Dr. Johnston asked for COVID related updates from representatives of state agencies.

**Updates from State Agencies**

- DESE developed a compensatory service fact sheet for parents and expanded the list of recipients to include community and advocacy organizations to share with families.

* DESE shared the DPH COVID safety FAQ document with special education leaders across the state.
* DESE is expanding testing options.
* DESE is continuing to work on parent engagement.
* DESE is putting out guidance documents related to truancy with DCF.
* DDS has an RFR in process for family support centers and award letters will go out soon.
* DDS waiver program added home delivered meals during COVID and has applied to keep it a permanent part of the waiver program.
* EI has an ASD RFR under review, contracts rewards are being finalized and notifications will go out once posting happens.
* EI is still following DPH guidance for telehealth services if possible, a recent informal survey of providers indicated about one half of services are being given fa ce to face.
* BPS is working to address the needs of families and working toward safely getting students back into the classrooms. There are concerns about high need students compliance ability to maintaining social distance and mask protocols.
* Public school monitoring by DESE will begin in January. District reviews will include civil rights issues, how services are being provided in all models, how communication is delivered and documented and if it is in the language of the family.
* BMC Autism Center has been working to support patients and families with navigation and virtual ABA services.
* BCSC has seen challenges in ability to obtain ASD diagnosis, there is a longer wait list due to the pandemic. They are trying to get face to face appointments up and running.

Dr. Johnston reviewed the current list of Subcommittee priorities with the group and updates were given on each one.

**Updates on Existing Subcommittee Priorities**

1. AAC devices Access data - MassHealth was contacted about providing existing data

2. Level of Inclusion of ASD students - MassHealth may not be able to provide that data at this time due to pandemic priority issues.

3. Number of ASD students in DCF care - DCF was contacted about existing data, and a representative from DCF will speak to our subcommittee. We can send a list of questions prior to the meeting for the representative to address.

4. Age/Race data for students diagnosed with ASD- MassHealth does not have data broken down by age and race at this time, but would consider it for the future.

5. New Electronic IEP - this project is ongoing.

6. Shortage of ABA providers - further exploration could be done regarding barriers to services that exist with certain providers or insurance plans. Issues could be raised with MassHealth and the Division of Insurance.

The subcommittee determined that all of the above items would remain priorities, except obtaining the level of inclusion data, due to the pandemic’s impact on learning environments. We could revisit that issue at a later date. Dr. Johnston requested input from members regarding other priorities that the Subcommittee may want to add in light of the pandemic to address over the next year. Considerations are to include the COVID related positive impacts, additional needs or concerns, and recommended changes from previous delivery services.

**Considerations for Additional Recommendations/Priorities**

- What does LRE look like in a COVID Response Model?

* How do we better support LRE for students in hybrid, remote and in person models?
* Determining the most meaningful support environment for each student based on need.
* What is the impact of COVID on the age of diagnosis for children with ASD?
* Obtaining information about bare necessities that are lacking for families.
* Staffing and PPE related shortages information from agencies with residential services.
* EI services broken down by language and ethnicity for families. Looking at numbers of families in lower economic areas that were enrolled in EI, but not receiving services.
* Who are we not engaging with for services that are not being delivered?
* What is the impact of the current school structure on student and families behavioral health and overall wellbeing, both short term and long term?
* Developing an ABA services survey to look at the percentage of services being delivered by tele-health, and provide guidance to families to access tele health ABA.
* Does providing ABA remotely assist with the current provider shortages?
* If remote ABA is working successfully, can it continue that way post COVID restrictions?
* What is the timeline from getting a diagnosis to starting services?
* Looking at some positive aspects of service delivery during COVID and whether they can continue in place.
* Consideration of what has been learned and advancements that have been made during the pandemic.
* Impact COVID has on the level of higher need of students. Services required by school and insurance plans to address regression.
* Looking at characteristics within students and families that contribute to the level of success of remote learning.
* Survey the health and wellbeing of families during the pandemic.
* Positives aspects of COVID, better parent engagement within districts, staff reaching out to students to make home/school connections.
* Impact of COVID on other acute issues. Increased ER visits and boarding as a result of lack of ABA services and structure.
* Catalog the challenges to help develop plans on the go forward for when safety nets of services are unavailable in the future.
* Catalog the successes. Get feedback from agencies that have done well in the pandemic, to determine what worked well and consider creating models for the future future.
* Look at the number of students on IEP’s that received in person services at community centers.
* What is the impact of COVID on the rate of certification of BCBAs?
* Challenges to finding paraprofessionals and RBTs due to training related requirements that are unable to be done with current COVID restrictions.
* Expanding virtual family support groups and including ones in different languages.
* Could social skills groups be created virtually for students to help parents?
* BCBA digital resources for families for direct interaction.
* BCBA licensure.
* Developing a vocational tract for RBT certification at vocational/ technical schools.
* Impact of ASD on COVID. Are children with autism more likely to develop COVID than their peers? Do they develop more severe cases of COVID than peers? Is co morbidity a factor?
* Continued telehealth services for families covered by insurance and MassHealth.
* Telehealth options for ABA and BCBA consults for families on MassHealth.

The list will be categorized and distributed to the subcommittee by mail for further review and consideration of potential new priorities or recommendations for the Birth to Fourteen Years Old subcommittee for the upcoming year.

With no further items to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 2:25pm.