Massachusetts Autism Commission

14-22 years of age/Employment Subcommittee Meeting

Virtual Webex Meeting

October 27, 2020

1:00 p.m.– 2:30 p.m.

**Remote Participation**

Toni Wolf (Co-Chair), Sacha Stadhard (Co-Chair), Dianne Lescinskas, Carolyn Kain, Terri Farrell, Amanda Green, Maura Sullivan, Gyasi Burkes-Abbott, Pamela Furgerson, Chris Supple, Judith Ursitti, Margaret Van Gelder, Janine Solomon, Ilyse-Levine Kanji, and Kathleen Stern

Commissioner Wolf stated that the meeting was subject to the Open Meeting Law and that the Subcommittee members present would need to vote to approve the remote participation members because of their geographic location, whenever any members were utilizing video and/or teleconferencing. Remote access was approved unanimously.

**Welcome and Check In**

Commissioner Wolf welcomed members of the 14-22/Employment Subcommittee and each member introduced themselves on WebEx.

**Presentation by Greg Rosen**

Greg Rosen put together a PowerPoint presentation to address the subcommittee members on the pandemic and how it is affecting employment and education for ASD individuals.

* Difficulty in getting in-person services
* Using more technology (zoom, webex) – good for some but not good for others – difficult to read non-verbal communication
* Working from home has advantages (not dealing with transportation)
* A need for more in-person meetings
* Education – hybrid model works well for some students with ASD but for those with higher needs, in-person learning is best – ABA will need 1:1
* Greg reviewed different organizations that are employing/training individuals with ASD – HMEA, Easter Seals, DELL, AANE, Dana Faber and MRC
* MRC is funding the HMEA and Easter Seals projects
* Transportation causes more barriers than zoom meetings
* Some advantages to virtual meetings are that “older” individuals have success with them but more difficult for younger individuals to sit in front of a screen all day – movement breaks can be helpful

**Role of this Subcommittee in COVID**

Ms. Stadhard put together slides to review the role of this subcommittee and the scope of work as we move forward. Slide one reviewed the Autism Omnibus Law that was taken from the Annual Report.

* *The Omnibus Law also required the Commission to further investigate and study the higher education opportunities, employment training opportunities, and employment opportunities available to person with autism spectrum disorder, and to determine the current status of such higher education opportunities, employment training opportunities and employment opportunities, but not limited to vocational training programs for teen-aged and young adult persons with ASD and make recommendations for providing appropriate higher education, employment training and employment opportunities for the population of residents in the commonwealth diagnosed with ASD.*

This subcommittee is not limited to the Autism Omnibus Law and will look at a plan of action and the recommendations that were put forth last year. How is this subcommittee considering the impact of COVID?

**Scope of Work**

* Review of the recommendation for Extended School Day – the new reality is there are no after school programs currently happening and should we shift our focus and is this still a priority?
* Mr. Supple had worked with DESE on Extended School Day and feels that COVID doesn’t lessen this need and asked that we keep an eye on this issue. 14-22 aged students need to be better prepared and some students have 6 hours of in-school learning while others have 24 hours but there is nothing in-between. Extended School Day could assist with this issue and help to better prepare the students for employment and independent living
* It was asked if this committee should look at students getting an additional year of school (stay until 23 years old) to make up for lost time due to the pandemic
* Ms. Kain reviewed the timeline for the Annual Report – recommendations for the report would come in by December (no requirement for new recommendations) the report is filed in March

**Suggested Areas of Focus**

*Increase access to technology*

*Virtual employment training opportunities*

*Remote employment opportunities*

*Access to virtual extended day programming*

*\*Looking at employer hiring practices*

* The above suggested areas of focus were discussed and it was said that some individuals cannot access any virtual opportunities and how should this subcommittee address this – look at the full representation of ASD
* DESE – one of the top priorities has been issuing guidance for high need students to have in-person instruction – DESE is working with districts who have some resistance – DESE is starting to audit districts that have low COVID numbers and are not providing in-person instruction
* The subcommittee members agreed to add an additional area of focus – ***Continued access for high priority students for in-person education services when safe and feasible (33% of the ASD population needs intensive support)***
* The committee should also think about how to best support the families/parents since they are at home supporting individuals and they may need additional support
* Think about models of “Learning Labs” who are doing good work during the pandemic and highlight the work
* DDS has Support Centers throughout the state and 7 are dedicated to ASD – it was asked if this committee could get a list or a sense of what they are offering now in terms of activities and the type of caregiver support being offered. The Centers have been providing virtual opportunities for individuals, funding for technology needs, basic needs and food. Some are receiving in-home support
* MRC and MassHire are thinking about the emerging trends of remote work and how to offer training for this type of work

**Data from the Autism Commission Annual Report**

* *MRC currently serves 279 VR consumers with ASD enrolled in post-secondary education. In terms of race and ethnicity these 279 are broken down as 247 white, 25 African-American, 3 Native American, 12 Asian/Pacific Islander, and 11 Hispanic ethnicity.*
* *MRC has over 30 providers of pre-employment services (Pre-ETS), which provide job exploration counseling, workplace readiness trainings, workplace learning experiences, counseling in post-secondary training opportunities and self-advocacy. In FY19 MRC referred 994 consumers with ASD to its Pre-ETS vendors. In terms of race and ethnicity these 994 are broken down as 842 white, 92 African-American, 9 Native American, 37 Asian/Pacific Islander, and 65 Hispanic ethnicity.*
* The committee members reviewed this data and discussed access and equity and how to address barriers to ensure under-represented populations are accessing services
* It was asked if the MRC data could be broken down by town - MRC may not be collecting data broken down by ASD but will look into it
* MRC is looking at how they will improve the 688 process and how a consumer comes to MRC for the first time. They are also looking at MRC Connect and how to make the “front door” more accessible

*New 2019 Recommendation*

*Inclusion for Students with ASD*

*That the Autism Commission request that DESE provide data broken down by race, language spoken in the home and level of inclusion (full/partial/substantially separate) for students with ASD.*

* DESE collects data in October and March and will look into pulling this data

The subcommittee members agreed to review the last slide of the PPT at the next meeting (Access and Equity) due to time constraints. The next meeting for this subcommittee will be held on December 10, 2020.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.