Massachusetts Autism Commission

Meeting Minutes

October 28, 2020– 2:00 p.m.– 3:30 p.m.

Via WebEx

Present: Katie Mick Undersecretary (EHS), Carolyn Kain, Jane Ryder (DDS), Elizabeth Morse (DDS), Janet George (DDS), Rep. Christine Barber (HOU), Sen. Joan Lovely, Ann Reale (Undersecretary EOE), Sacha Stadhard (EOL), Sam Aigner-Treworgy (EEC), Robert Jones (EHS), Mary Price (DHE), Katherine Downes, Kate Ginnis (EHS) , Kathy Sanders (DMH), Theresa Schirmer, Christine Hubbard, Russell Johnston (DESE), Amy Weinstock, Bronia Clifton (DHCD), Michele Brait, Joan Butterfield (DPH), Toni Wolf (MRC), Katherine Canada (DCF), Dania Jekel, Judith Ursitti, Ann Neumeyer, Emma Vazquez, Johanna Wakelin, James Vander Hooven, Joanne Simmons, Rita Gardner, Julia Landau, Michael Borr, Molly Evans, Paige Higgins and Dan Burke.

**Welcome - Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes from February**

Undersecretary Katie Mick called the meeting to order and welcomed the Autism Commission members to the meeting.

Commission members were asked to approve the minutes from the meeting on July 16, 2020. Commissioner Toni Wolf moved the motion Christine Hubbard seconded the motion. The members of the Commission used the “raise hand” caption on WebEx to vote and the minutes were approved unanimously.

**Presentations by EEC and DESE**

**EEC Presentation**

Commissioner Aigner-Treworgy updated the Commission members on the work that has been done since the shut down in March.

***Program Reopening***

* 75% pre-COVD capacity
* Of those who are enrolled, approximately 1/3 (or 35,637) are not attending
* On average, 3,919 children receive DCF related vouchers each month

***Overview of Child Care Tuition Subsidies***

* EEC has adjusted subsidy policies to support the needs of families and programs during COVID
* Paying full day subsidy rates for school aged children attending care while enrolled in remote instructional models
* Continued underwriting of parent fees through February
* Flexibility and options for parents who do not wish to return to care immediately
* Extended job search periods up to 26 weeks for all families to maintain subsidy eligibility during uncertain employment
* Revised closure policy for providers who need to close due to exposure
* Enrollment of children involved with DCF has been relatively stable

***EEC Program Supports and Accommodations***

* EEC has been working closely with DESE to define solutions for supplemental care while children engage in remote learning
* EEC licensed programs so they can partner with districts and municipalities to provide care options for school aged children
* Remote Learning Enrichment Program license exemption was created for those entities to meet specific needs of their communities
* Provide guidance around Remote Learning Parent Cooperatives – informal arrangements of families working together to support the learning of their school aged children
* EEC providers have applied to increase capacity to meet the needs of their community
* EEC has supported programs to serve children with ASD by providing guidance on in-person services in child-care setting when needed
* Mental and Behavioral Health Consultants continue to support providers with key challenges through virtual visits and coaching – remote access to help teachers when dealing with behavior challenges during remote learning

**DESE Presentation**

Russell Johnston updated the Commission members with a PowerPoint presentation on the work being done by DESE.

* Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance was issued on June 25, 2020 - it prioritized getting students back to school in person – the guidance is translated into five languages
* There are 3 models in the guidance – In-person, Hybrid Instruction and Remote Instruction
* Additional Follow Up Guidance was provided in July and August
* The color-coded metric from COVID command allowed DESE to issue additional guidance for selecting a learning model – this guidance helps with what type of instruction model a district may use
* Each week the data is updated on the number of cases in schools – 400,000 students are back in school and the transmission rate is low. Schools and districts should make decisions based on data and look at 3 weeks of data before reacting and making a change in a learning model

***Special Education Reopening Guidance***

* Students must receive all services documented in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote or combination of both
* Schools must make every effort to maintain in-person instruction full time or part time
* The services outlined in the IEP should remain and are considered “stay-put”
* Teachers/liaison should contact the parents as soon as possible to discuss how a student’s IEP services will be delivered
* DESE provided a Technical Assistance Advisory on COVID-19 Compensatory Services and Recovery Support for Students with IEPs
* Back to School Letter for Families of Children with Disabilities (9/2020) is now translated into 16 languages

***Technical Assistance***

* DESE is shifting from releasing guidance to providing direct support and producing specific resources and tools
* Sample parent letters are provided to districts to help with communication to families
* DESE has expanded internal capacity to develop a district’s own cadre of trained interpreters and expanded and enhanced school and district capacity to use interpretation services to engage and teach students
* DESE has identified 20+ districts with the highest need students to provide increased access and has hired Lionbridge, Inc., an on-demand telephonic interpretation service that is available 24/7/365 with over 380 different languages
* Offering Interpreter and Translator in Education Training Workshop Series to train bilingual, in-district staff on standards and procedures for interpretation and translation

***Ongoing Support for Key Staff Members***

* Mobile Rapid Response Testing Unit and a Rapid Response Help Center- DESE has created a dashboard to track cases and will be at the ready to provide direct support and technical assistance in navigating situations
* DESE continues to work on 51A reporting with partners at DCF and school discipline

***Questions from Chat Feature***

* It was asked if students who have or are turning 22 during the pandemic could stay in school past the day of turning 22. Students who have turned 22 between March and December 23, 2020 will be considered for compensatory services. After that date there is work that is in development to address the needs moving forward.
* Question on DCF and local districts about outreach to ensure children in custody are receiving services on their IEP. There has been joint training with DCF and it is one of the priorities to ensure they are receiving services.
* DESE has been working collaboratively with the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - resources have been provided via the resource guide (DESE website) and they continue to answer any questions.

**ABA Survey**

Undersecretary Reale developed a survey to address the concerns of operation of Center Based ABA Programs without clear oversight authority. This survey is a result of the discussion from the Autism Commission meeting in February 2020 and the goal is to help with identifying how and when services are delivered. The survey will not be distributed broadly but is a targeted effort to survey centers that this group has knowledge of. Undersecretary Reale asked for feedback on the survey and once feedback is received, the survey will be sent out. The data received will help formulate a recommendation on oversight of health and safety for ABA Center Based Programs. It was asked that feedback be sent by November 4th.

**Update on Autism Commission Annual Report**

Ms. Kain discussed the process of providing recommendations for the draft annual report. Due to the pandemic, the subcommittees have shifted priorities and there has not been a lot of discussion on new recommendations that are typically due in December. There is no requirement to submit new recommendations but adjusting priorities or addressing remote needs is something to consider. Any recommendations or adjustments to previous recommendations would be due the first week of December. The next meeting of the Autism Commission is on December 17th.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.