**Autism Commission**

**Birth to Fourteen Years Old Subcommittee Meeting**

April 30, 2021 10:00 am -12:00pm

Via Webex

Present on Webex : Co- chairs Russell Johnston and Michele Brait, Michelle Poulin, Beth Jerskey, Joan Rafferty Butterfield, Shari King, Rob Polsinelli, Julia Landau, Zachary Houston, Michelle Jenkins, Julie Kelly, Diane Lescinskas and Carolyn Kain.

Dr. Russell Johnston called the meeting to order and welcomed all members of the Birth to Fourteen Years Subcommittee. The meeting norms were read, and subcommittee members present voted unanimously to approve the February meeting minutes. The Subcommittee then addressed the agenda items.

**Agency Updates from Subcommittee Members**

Ms. Butterfield updated the subcommittee members on Early Intervention and what has been going on in recent months.

* According to most recent DPH data: 90 % of Early Intervention services are via tele-health, and 40% of ASD Early Intervention services are via tele-health.
* MassHealth will cover EI tele-health services for 90 days after the governor ends the state of emergency in MA. Commercial Insurance companies have not stated how long they plan to cover the tele-health services, but they often follow MassHealth.
* Center based EI services are being delivered with justification for some children’s groups, but it is likely home based in person services will start before center based programs for most.
* Due to challenges with administering assessment tools, clinical judgement was allowed during the pandemic to begin EI services and assessments were done when possible.
* School referrals have been happening right along.
* Extension for referrals ended in October. Referrals to schools are a requirement once EI is complete.
* DDS is working with ABA agencies who are doing work in centers on weekends and in the evenings to deliver EEC center based services.

*Additional Updates*

* There are very few teacher applicants for ESY in Boston Public Schools.
* Bryce’s Journey has been working with families to build trust around returning to in person learning and getting vaccinated. Many families are very hesitant and cultural considerations need to be understood and considered.
* DESE deadline for in person learning for high school students is May 17th. Summer services will be in person, but families may choose to remain remote. Next school year, all students are expected to be in school except for a medical reason.

**Recommendations for overcoming impacts of COVID**

Considerations for Long-term Supports and Services around Health and Safety, Academics and Learning, Behavior and Social Emotional supports, and Parent Engagement.

Health and Safety:

* Vaccine access for families and students
* Reactions to social distancing in school being further reduced or taken away
* Executive functioning and dis-regulation issues as a result of prolonged trauma from pandemic impact on teachers, students and families
* Families living in full crisis for many months during pandemic struggling to get back into routines
* Social emotional and mental health needs around returning to in-person learning
* Create phase-in plans for families to meet individual student needs, how would they look and be executed
* Transportation issues arising for families participating in a phase in or partial school day
* Build trust with families so there is more of a comfort level with returning to school. Use promotional information, designate a point person, a teacher or therapist to be a liaison to help families that are struggling
* Establish routines and repeat them to further build trust and support a new routine to use each day to its fullest
* Reassure parents who have children with behaviors that may increase initially use shared plans for what will be in place for them to give support
* Increased 1:1 support for students, disclose staff ratios to families
* DESE recommendation to parents about the value of vaccination and consider offering vaccines at schools – highlight the positive aspects of being vaccinated which will open activities further for students
* Reassure those who do not wish to be vaccinated that they can still participate with precautions in place
* Family concerns around vaccinating children with ASD - DESE meet with DPH and the Dept. of Health and Human Services to provide supportive information to address hesitancy

Academics

* Take advantage of the opportunity to do things differently so old ways are not repeated
* Districts will have lots of funding available to use for students, consider what academics should look like for students with ASD and how to make up for lost time
* Have realistic expectations that students will need more, as there will be an increase in behaviors and school refusal
* Staffing is an issue - teacher layoffs in Braintree Public Schools?
* Provide enough resources so that reintegration to school is successful by putting more into the transitional period
* Recognize there will be a higher level of need for students overall whether on an IEP or not
* Consider starting some of these practices over the summer and adding resources before September
* Create summer programming for all students - integrated ESY and acceleration camps that have both supported academics and supported social and play components
* Have schools look at their needs and their services. Parents are reporting that the IEP is irrelevant, students need to get back to baseline before even addressing the IEP
* Do reassessments now to see what is needed for services and utilize the summer to put them in place for the fall. Send a message to schools that TEAM meetings can happen over the summer
* Some students may not be in a place where they can be assessed due to level of regression from the pandemic, a plan is needed to begin that process
* Use community partners to provide extended earning opportunities which helps parents as well as children
* DESE send a message to districts that partnering with community organizations is encouraged
* Partnerships should be culturally rooted having a representative that is like the families in the community
* Build relationships with parents who are uncomfortable and feel intimidated by the school TEAM
* Create paid school ambassador positions to be filled by parents in the community representing diverse populations to work with families and the school
* Have a point person at the school reach out to local community organizations – “resource mapping” to identify community based resources around individual schools
* Initiate system level changes to assist parents who have difficulty understanding the IEP process and language of the IEP but are fearful to speak up. Try to better engage families around the TEAM meeting and IEP
* Address cultural issues and the impacts of racism
* Help the populations disproportionately impacted by COVID
* TEAM meetings need to be more collaborative and less adversarial
* DESE professional development trainings for evaluation team leaders- consider what we want the school experience to be, the parent experience to be, the expectations for IEP meting
* Diversity recruitment of workforce

Behavioral and Social Emotional Supports

* Parents who have been called to pick up their children from school due to behaviors in the past they may fear an increase in these incidents as students are dis-regulated from being out of school for so long
* Transitioning back to school - many things will be unknown until students are back in classes
* There is a very short supply of ASD mental health beds in Emergency Rooms
* Students may not be able to attend to learning initially - the mental health piece will be big and needs to be planned accordingly
* BCBA’s are stretched with caseloads that are too high
* Some students may not be able to handle full inclusion initially
* Data on high need students and how they have done since being back in school is not available
* School monitoring is being done and physical restraint data is taken
* School Monitoring is looking at where kids with disabilities are being serviced, looking at sub separate classrooms and the level of inclusion. There is not much of a data shift showing yet but likely next year the full value of the impact will be seen, currently things are still in transition

DESE

* Consider ideas to support all students and families
* Use of acceleration roadmaps - to be released in May for districts to project what we want school to look like by the end of next year and work backwards from that. There will be road maps for educators and for administrators
* DESE will release new guidance for next year in May
* Ideas for special education leaders meetings going forward
* Guidance on in-person IEP’s, currently DESE says zoom meetings can continue but many families prefer the in-person meetings
* DESE needs to clarify who has final say about IEP meeting, whether it can be in-person at the parent request, as well as what to expect for BCSA hearings being in-person

Dr. Johnston thanked everyone for their input to the discussion during the meeting.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting concluded at 11: 51 a.m.