Massachusetts Autism Commission

14-22 years of age/Employment Subcommittee Meeting

Via WebEx

February 9, 2021

11:00 a.m.– 12:30 p.m.

**Remote Participation**

Toni Wolf (Co-Chair), Sacha Stadhard (Co-Chair), Dianne Lescinskas, Carolyn Kain, Amanda Green, Maura Sullivan, Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Pamela Ferguson, Margaret Van Gelder, Janine Solomon, Ilyse-Levine Kanji, Chris Supple, Lea Hill, Kathleen Kelly, Terri Farrell, Nancy Parker, Kevin Barrett, Mike Plansky, Ann Guay, and Kathleen Stern

**Welcome and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Wolf welcomed members of the 14-22/Employment Subcommittee and each member introduced themselves on WebEx. Nancy Parker is a new member of the subcommittee and is the Director of Child and Teen Services for AANE.

The minutes from the meeting on December 10th, 2020 were reviewed and Commissioner Wolf motioned to approve the minutes. Ms. Kain moved the motion and Mr. Burkes- Abbott seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously with Nancy Parker abstaining from the motion.

**Access and Equity -follow up strategy approach with data – Springfield , Worcester and Boston**

Ms. Stadhard discussed the data that was prepared by DESE and that was further broken down to the three larger school districts. This was a recommendation from 2019 and the data that was requested included student placement based on race and language. The larger set of data was reviewed at the last meeting and this data will give an opportunity to review at a micro level and take a deeper dive. Commissioner Wolf has asked the MRC analysis group to look at the data and gather a report. The data will look to see if there are any red flags and address any inequities they may find.

*Discussion*

* DESE IEP data system is set up to only look at the primary diagnosis, not secondary diagnosis.

**MRC Connect – Innovation Update at MRC**

Commissioner Wolf presented the subcommittee members with an update on MRC Connect.

* MRC has heard from families and consumers that they have had difficulty accessing the “Front Door”. MRC Connect is and innovative way to help solve this issue.
* More structured, better customer service.
* Included: Voc. Rehab., SHIP, Supported Living, 688
* Will include an online application but also phone access.
* Starts with initial contact – online application/phone; document collection; eligibility determination.
* MRC has carefully looked at the data – 34% of 688 students exit because MRC is not able to locate the individual – MRC Connect will be more streamlined.
* MRC Connect positions will include: Information Navigator, Consumer Service Advisor, Eligibility Screener, Eligibility Supervisor, Eligibility Director – the team will be fully remote.
* Online application rolled out on December 4th with positive response – the online application will be translated to 5 languages (rolled out end of February)
* Dashboard Metrics – Front Door volume, Timeliness – from eligibility to planning

*Discussion*

* DDS would like to share this information with their Support Centers. Once MRC Connect is fully rolled out it will be shared with others.
* It was asked about the shift from area offices doing eligibility to the MRC Connect taking over and the transition back to an area office after an individual is found eligible. There will be metrics on the timeline, and it is expected to take 30-45 days to receive a service – this will evolve over time.
* MRC is developing an IT solution and had received capital funds for this.
* MRC is currently collecting data on ASD.

**Review of Report and Subcommittee Recommendations**

*Clarity on Recommendation and Identify Action Steps*

Ms. Stadhard discussed the recommendation from the 2019 Annual Report. She asked that the committee members review the language and consider if this is still a recommendation and how to move forward.

*The subcommittee will consider whether recommendations should be made regarding the potential role of extended day opportunities after-school and on the weekends in providing options in lieu of residential placements when appropriate and in preparing transition-age youth diagnosed with ASD for life in the workplace and community after their school eligibility ends at 22. The 14-22/Employment Subcommittee will evaluate ways to provide information to parents, self-advocates, and school districts related to the rights to extended day* programming*.*

Ms. Kain gave clarification to this recommendation. Ms. Kain explained that the issue of “extended year” is an individual IEP Team determination, and that we cannot make a recommendation that conflicts with the process under federal or state law. Ms. Kain noted that many schools stopped offering ABA services after-school and on the weekends after ABA services became covered by health insurance under the ARICA law and the Autism Omnibus Law. Ms. Kain further explained that “extended day” is different from accessing after-school programming, and that students with ASD and other disabilities have the right to equal access to that programming under the ADA. Ms. Kain also mentioned that the DDS/DESE program provides additional services to supplement special education services and that there was a recent increase of $4 million dollars to that “residential prevention program”. The group had previously discussed that educating parents on all of these issues would be helpful in their advocating for additional services, including community-based programs like those at YMCAs and Boys and Girls Clubs.

Ms. Green agreed with Ms. Kain’s response and added that focusing on extended day may not be the correct approach for this subcommittee. It would be more effective to push on the students’ rights to accessing after-school programming under the ADA and 504.

*Discussion*

* Push back for After-School Programming when related to medication or a need for a 1:1.
* Legally the school should give reasonable accommodations to support a student – such as additional staff or nursing services.
* Schools push back on 1:1 in after-school and will say it is an unduly burden.
* “The life of the school” – what ever is offered to other students in after-school should be offered to SWDs.
* It was said that students need more support to prevent residential placements.
* There has been work done in some school districts to ensure that SWD are included in after-school programming – also, places like the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, in some areas, are inclusive and have programming for SWD.
* There is a need to address the social and emotional aspects of ASD and give more opportunities to engage with peers after the regular school day – after-school programs can also work on transition skills that could lead to employment.
* There was discussion on the reason for this recommendation was for severely impacted ASD students who may be at risk for residential.

Ms. Kain will revise the language of the recommendation to reflect after-school programming and she will send the draft language to the subcommittee members.

**Forecasting/Recommendation Role of the Subcommittee**

The co-chairs shared language from the 2019 Annual Report of the Autism Commission under the Omnibus Law. They asked members to review the language and to discuss a potential recommendation under the categories of Higher Education, Employment Opportunities and Employment Training Opportunities. Ms. Kain has collected data from DESE and it has shown the increase in the ASD population over the past 15+ years and the data has been previously discussed with the subcommittee and the Autism Commission. There was discussion on a data review at the next meeting as it relates to forecasting and one possible recommendation that this subcommittee could consider is raising awareness with businesses on the hiring process to include interview process, application etc. Mr. Burkes-Abbott had sent members of the subcommittee a link to a report from Workability for review and there are similar recommendations in the report on employment. When considering recommendations, this subcommittee should think about what is in our control and how can we leverage the current work that is being done across the state. In terms of higher education, there are supports that include coaching services and dual enrollment. The subcommittee could think about services being expanded.

***Next Steps***

* Think about the practices already in existence and leveraging those in terms of a recommendation.
* Have subcommittee break into smaller groups and each group focus on either Employment Training, Employment Opportunity, Higher Education or data forecasting.
* Subcommittee members were asked if they had a particular interest in working the following:

1. Forecasting data and projecting the next 3-5 years – if members have an interest in this, they should reach out to Commissioner Wolf.
2. Looking at Employment Training, Employment Opportunity and Higher Education practices and leveraging what already exists – interested members should reach out to Ms. Stadhard.

Ms. Kain commented that the data will give us “estimates”, but it doesn’t give us the “spectrum” data on the number of individuals who are severely impacted by ASD (non-verbal, intellectually impaired) and those less impacted by ASD (highly verbal with average or above average intelligence). There needs to be flexibility in the system to meet the needs of the diverse group as well as address language access and equity.

Higher Ed is not collecting outcome data for individuals with disabilities – something that this subcommittee could look at – this data could be helpful.

Committee members were asked to review the Workability Report.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.