Massachusetts Autism Commission

14-22 years of age/Employment Subcommittee Meeting

Via WebEx

April 13, 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, Janine Solomon, Ilyse-Levine Kanji, Chris Supple, Judith Ursitti, Lea Hill, Kathleen Kelly, Terri Farrell, Nancy Parker, Ann Guay, and Kathleen Stern

Guests from MRC: Bill Noone, Theo Marinakis, Graham Porell, Scott Leung

**Welcome and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Wolf welcomed members of the 14-22/Employment Subcommittee and each member introduced themselves on WebEx. The minutes from the meeting on February 9, 2021 were reviewed and Ms. Kain motioned to approve the minutes with one minor change noted. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Ms. Ursitti announced that she has left Autism Speaks and now works for the Council for Autism Service Provider. She discussed a pilot project in Iowa – Workforce Innovation Now – helping to create a successful work environment for autistic individuals. Ms. Ursitti offered to connect this subcommittee to the project so members could gain a better understanding of the work.

**Review Revised 2019 Recommendation**

The recommendation was sent to members of the subcommittee prior to the meeting to review. Ms. Kain gave some background information on this recommendation and there is additional information in the meeting minutes from February. Below is the most recent revised language for the recommendation.

* *Revised: The 14-22+ Employment subcommittee recommends that parents be provided with information and educational materials regarding their right to request longer day services as part of their child’s special education IEP services, after-school programming to enable students with ASD to participate in extracurricular/non-academic activities, and community-based services at YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs and other organizations along with their non-disabled peers, and the DDS/DESE residential prevention program. The subcommittee recommends that this information be developed by DESE and the Federation for Children with Special Needs, with input from this subcommittee, as part of the Federation’s Parent Training programs and materials. The goal of this recommendation is to provide additional opportunities for individuals with ASD for skill development and generalization of skills to avoid the need for a more restrictive setting, such as a residential school placement.*

*Discussion*

* It is important to educate parents about SWD rights to after school programming
* There was discussion on “reminding” school districts about SWD rights to access after school programming – this could be achieved through professional development
* Partnering with outside afterschool programs/community programs like the Boys & Girls Clubs/YMCA
* Extended School Day on the IEP is a team decision
* Equal access for all students
* The Annual Report was submitted in March so this recommendation could be included in next years’ report
* There was discussion on the wording on the IEP regarding an Extended School Day (a blank IEP form that includes this language was sent to members of the subcommittee via email) – discussion on collecting data regarding how many students receive a “longer school day” – this had been discussed at a previous meeting.
* DESE does not have data on what is on an individual student’s IEP
* A letter from Russel Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner (DESE) and the DESE legal team was sent to Mr. Supple (2019) regarding Extended School Day and this letter was shared again today via email to subcommittee members for review
* Mr. Supple commented that the letter frames the ESD determination as a simple matter of FAPE, whereas the language on the IEP form frames it differently and suggests that eligibility for an ESD requires a higher threshold, namely “to prevent substantial loss of previously learned skills“;  specifically, the letter says “the IEP Team may decide that based upon the student’s needs, the student requires a different daily duration in order to receive FAPE”, whereas the IEP form says “Does this student require a longer school day or a longer school year to prevent substantial loss of previously learned skills and / or substantial difficulty in relearning skills?”
* Ms. Kain discussed DDS/DESE program and the additional funding (4 million) that was added two years ago. This program provides services outside of the regular school day. The majority of student in this program are ASD and for individuals involved in this program it can help with prioritization for adult services
* SSquall funding was discussed (adult service funding) – this is a DDS code used for assigning services

It was asked that any suggested edits/revisions/comments to this recommendation be sent to Ms. Kain by the end of the week. Once revised, Ms. Kain will share the document with members of the subcommittee.

**MRC Autism Report for Forecasting Purposes**

Commissioner Wolf introduced members of the MRC Analytics and Quality Assurance team. They are attending the meeting to review the MRC data that has been provided to Ms. Kain for the Annual Report each year.

The PowerPoint presentation addressed the following topics of data:

* + Gender (80% male/20% female)
  + Race/Ethnicity (5 year trend)
  + Age Groups
  + Other Characteristics
  + Job Seekers with Autism Maps
  + Job Seekers with Autism Receiving Services/Obtaining Employment
  + Students/Youth
  + Education/Training for Autism and DD
  + Employment
  + Future Recommendations

The data reviewed a 5-year trend with the population increasing each year and projected to increase through FY25. The population will continue to get more diverse over the next 5 years.

*Discussion*

* The Transition Pathways Service grant was discussed and it helps to provide wrap around services. The Roxbury office participated in this grant – the information gathered is helping MRC to learn how to better serve individuals in that community
* Future work – One MRC is being developed – a new computer system to enhance the way consumers enter into MRC
* MRC worked with UMass Boston (report will come out soon) and had focus groups of families and consumers. MRC received a tremendous amount information on what they can do to improve services (better communication and responsiveness, more employment choices, more training). The report will be shared with members of the subcommittee
* Slide 13 and 14 shows 3343 job seekers with ASD and 344 employed. Some of this data could be because consumers may only stay with MRC an average of 3 years. MRC is currently looking to increase employment opportunities by partnering with Career Centers and technology programs (cybersecurity). They are also seeing more individuals with complex needs and MRC needs to look at how to adapt to new consumers and develop a different model of service
* MRC model of “90 day support” may not work with ASD – look at support on an “as needed” basis for when specific issues arise to help problem solve, build in support with co-workers (natural support) education for organizations and co-workers, making the system more nimble and responsive will be important for future planning
* There are some success stories! Aspire does staff training and had a positive outcome at Fidelity with the staff.
* MRC has built in a mentor program to help with employee support on the job
* AANE also provides training to employers
* Ms. Greene reported that a teacher had shared that the greatest issue for some SWD is self- disclosure and self-determination and it can be a barrier for some students – they resist identifying with a disability so they are not interested in Pre ETs (this is also addressed in the Workability Report) The greatest resistance can also be with the families.
* Commissioner Wolf has put in a submission for an innovation grant on self-determination and self-advocacy – MRC will find out in September if they have been awarded this grant

**Research Subgroup**

Subgroup Scope: Study of current work being done across the state to connect persons with ASD to Training, Higher Education, and Employment Opportunities.

Ms. Stadhard developed a subgroup to take a look at current work being done across the state and to provide recommendations regarding gaps, need for employment training and opportunities. The Workability Report has information on employment opportunities. Ms. Greene discussed the work that had been done by BSET. Pat Marshall and Dore Penn did extensive research on higher education and disabilities and that work should be available for this group to examine.

Ms. Levine had previously put together and excel spreadsheet that has a list of employers in MA who hire individuals with disabilities. Ms. Levine will send the link out to members of the subcommittee for review. The subcommittee members will review the list and discuss if this group is interested in further research at our next meeting. What is the best way to approach the work in the recommendation?

**MRC Learning Series: Autism and Employment**

AANE has partnered with MRC to offer a learning series. The training is for ASD adults, employers, co-workers, and providers. MRC and AANE will continue with this effort.

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