Massachusetts Autism Commission

14-22 years of age/Employment Subcommittee Meeting

Virtual - via zoom

May 9, 2023

11:00 a.m.– 12:30 p.m.

**Remote Participation**

 Sacha Stadhard (Co-Chair), Dianne Lescinskas, Carolyn Kain, Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Michael Stepansky, Janine Solomon, Greg Rosen, , Carol Gracia, Ilyse Levine , Nancy Parker and AJ Cullen

**Welcome and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Ms., Stadhard welcomed members of the 14-22/Employment Subcommittee and reviewed the agenda. The minutes from the last meeting, on March 14, 2023, were reviewed and Ms. Stadhard asked for a motion to approve the minutes, Ms. Kain motioned seconded the motion and Ms. Levine abstained from the vote. Hearing no further discussion or opposition, the meeting minutes were approved.

**Status of revised 2019 recommendation on Students with ASD receiving extended school day services**

Submitted to the Autism Commission on September 15, 2022

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.

*The 14-22+ Employment subcommittee recommends that parents be provided with information and educational materials regarding (1) their right to request longer day services to be considered as part of their child’s special education IEP services, (2) potential after-school programming to enable students with ASD to participate in extracurricular/non-academic activities and community-based services along with their non-disabled peers, and (3) the DDS/DESE residential prevention program (subject to availability). 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 2019 recommendation was revised for clarification and has been included in the annual report. The Commission spent time in reviewing the recommendation to make sure it was clear.

* Discussion on implementation of the recommendation – DESE has a partnership with the Federation and they work together on family resources
* Ms. Kain will reach out to DESE on who she should work with in connecting with the Federation
* Amanda Green was our contact person from DESE, but she has left her position, Ms. Kain had asked about a replacement for her on our committee – she will follow up on this action item
* We are not sure if the Federation is aware of this recommendation – Ms. Green may have brought it to their attention

**The 14-22+/employment subcommittee of the Commission has been examining the higher education opportunities, employment trainings opportunities and employment opportunities for persons with ASD to recommend a plan of action to the Autism Commission.***The Omnibus Law*

* Discussion on recommendations for a plan of action
* Ms. Kain discussed the action has been fluid since the passing of the Omnibus Law – DDS and MRC have provided opportunities for employment and training – Pre-ETs has been expanded and DDS has added additional coaching services for individuals entering higher education
* Both agencies have employment training, not exclusive to ASD but it is included and has improved
* DDS has coaching services for ASD through College Navigator – Easter Seals was the only provider for this service, but now, DDS has additional providers
* DDS also has coaching and pre-engagement for ASD
* MRC has a grant – NexGen – it is being implemented now and this subcommittee has had several presentations

***Reflection on Last Two Presentations***

**Using Autistic Adults’ Perspectives to Improve Supports for Employment Success**
*( presentation at the 1/10/23 Sub Committee. Presentation by Ian Moura and Dr. Joanne Nicholson)*

* Data was shared with this subcommittee and there were discussions on challenges for individuals especially around the interview process
* There is a need to ensure that employers are aware of the challenges and seek out training
* Job match matters
* The data that was presented supports the things that we know – things need to be done as an individual approach

**DESE Data Presentation on Placements of Students with ASD***(presentation at the 3/14/23 Subcommittee – Presentation by: Andrew Mackenzie, Amy Poulin, Amy Krukonis and Vani Rastigu-Kelly, Moses Nduati)*

DESE was invited to present to this subcommittee on DEI and public-school monitoring – many of DESE offices focus on racial equity, and they are always looking for room to improve their work.

* Everyone agrees, the data presented was eye opening
* DESE is providing support and professional development to address the disparities
* Asked if data could be broken down by level of need – DESE does not provide that data
* Comment was made that not all families want full inclusion placement – they want out of district placement (most families with greater means can fight for ODP)
* Need to keep the lens on equity when looking at the data – students should have equal access to placement and resources – parents need to be informed
* Placement settings relates to future employment – if a student is educated in a sub. separate setting at a young age, they may stay there and not have inclusion opportunities which can then affect their outcome later in life. The expectation level is often lowered in sub. separate settings.
* There is a need to ensure that caregivers have access to information to advocate
* Educational placement is a team decision and under due process and the IDEA – we could focus our efforts on the 7 areas of need that are in the IEP and request that the team is required to address them – including the placement of the student
* We can point out that more black and brown children are placed in sub. separate settings – DESE will make recommendations to districts but does not dictate what districts should be doing
* We could consider an amendment to Chapter 71 3b – on what the team should consider during the IEP meeting – executive function and life skills make a difference in life – we could say there has to be a goal on social skills and executive functioning
* There is a Transition Planning Form to address but school districts fill out the form but do not add goals or services that relate to transition
* We are constrained on our recommendation – we do not have direct authority over school districts

Ms. Levine wrote a draft recommendation that is based on team decision:

*Recognizing that all student placement decisions are based on individual team decisions, the*

*14-22+/Employment Subcommittee recommends that Massachusetts school districts and*

*families be made aware of the higher percentage of autistic students of color being placed in*

*substantially separate classrooms when compared to white autistic students, as data collected*

*by DESE’s Office of Public-School Monitoring has found. The subcommittee recommends that*

*DESE (1) share with all Massachusetts school districts and family’s data on the placement of*

*students whose primary disability is autism, broken into race, gender, English learner status,*

*and income level; (2) continue collecting and publicly disseminating this data; (3) continue and*

*increase its racial equity professional development and support regarding the intersection of*

*race and special education for decisions affecting student placement, graduation rates,*

*attendance rates, discipline rates and physical restraints. The goal of this recommendation is to*

*raise awareness of student placements and to promote racial equity in educational decisions*

*affecting autistic students of color*

* Publicizing the data could help make changes
* Helping parents understand students should have transition goals
* Revamping the “parents rights” to be more explisive on placement – the need for partial inclusion, higher expectations
* Some autistic students do well academically, attend college but drop out due to the lack of social skills, executive functioning, and anxiety
* There needs to be more education on having a part-time job while in high school – college may not work out or be for everyone
* We can look at higher ed. access to part time employment – help with transition to college – (MAICEI)
* It was asked if the subcommittee could ask DESE to present this data at the Autism Commission meeting. There is no date, yet, for the May meeting

**Action Items**

* Ask DESE if they would collect data on level of need of ASD students
* Could the data from DESE, be presented at an Autism Commission meeting?
* Ms. Kain will follow up with DESE and the Federation on the parent resource from our recommendation
* Look at the draft recommendation that Ilyse provided, work off-line on the recommendation – participants: Carolyn Kain, Dianne Lescinskas, Sacha Stadhard, AJ Cullen, Illyse Levine
* Ms. Stadhard will set up a meeting to discuss the possibility of a new recommendation (with smaller group)
* A meeting will be determined – possibly in July – for the subcommittee to come together and review the draft recommendation

With no further discussion, Ms. Stadhard made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Kain moved the motion to adjourn, and Ms. Levine seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

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