Autism Commission

Sub-Committee for Three Years Old - Fourteen Years Old

March 16, 2017 - 12:30pm-2:30pm

500 Harrison Avenue

Members present were Carolyn Kain, Dianne Lescinskas, Dr. Beth Jersky and Zackery Houston.

Members accessing meeting remotely were Christina Fitanides, Tere Ramos, Janice Lobel, Julie Kelley and Sue McCarthy.

Carolyn Kain, the Chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed the members to the meeting of this Sub-Committee. Ms. Kain stated that the meeting was subject to the Open Meeting Law and that the Sub-Committee members present would need to vote to approve the remote participation of some members because of their geographic location, whenever any members were utilizing video and/or tele-conferencing. Remote access was approved unanimously. Minutes from last meeting in February were reviewed and were approved unanimously.

Ms. Kain started the meeting with an update regarding the March 6th Commission Meeting and reviewed the recommendations that were presented to the full commission by this sub-committee.

**Transition and DESE**

Ms. Kain gave an update on the recent changes that have occurred with DESE. Marcia “Marty” Mittenacht retired and our DESE sub-committee member, Sara Geldart left the agency for a new position. Russel Johnston and Terri Williams Valentine have stepped into Marty’s role and DESE is looking to fill this position permanently. We are also looking for a replacement representative from DESE for our 3-14 year old sub-committee given Sarah Geldart’s recent departure. Ms. Kain will work with DESE to identify someone to join this sub-committee and commented that since many of the issues raised involve DESE that it is important for them to be part of our discussions.

**Brochure for Families and Caregivers**

Ms. Kain had previously asked members of this sub-committee to send Dianne Lescinskas information/input for a new brochure/fact sheet that will help to connect families with resources and knowledge on navigating the school system. We would like to have something in print and add additional information to our website. The purpose is to help families connect to state services and gain a better understanding of the special education process. Ms. Ramos and Ms. Kelley said they wanted Ms. Kain’s office to come up with a framework first and then they would respond with thoughts. Ms. Kain said that was fine but that since her office consists of three people she was asking subcommittee members to take on some of the work that needs to be done between meetings.

**Update -Autism Commission Meeting on March 6th**

* Presentation on the new website - getting feedback from Commission members prior to launching. Ms. Kain said that members of this sub-committee should send us any links that may be helpful to others that they wanted to be considered.
* Ms. Kain said that the Commission was not able to get through all of the sub-committee presentations at the meeting but she was able to present the 3-14 sub-committee’s recommendations.
* Ms. Kain also said that she had proposed to the Commission that an Interim report be submitted in June but they had not taken up that proposal on March 6th- she suggested that we need to discuss what, if any, additional recommendations this sub-committee wanted to propose to include in the next report. Ms. Kain said DESE should be included in these conversations.

Ms. Ramos asked how people were chosen to be the chair of the sub-committees, and asked if Ms. Kain’s role as the Chair of this sub-committee inhibited this sub-committee. Ms. Kain said she didn’t understand Ms. Ramos’ question especially since this sub-committee had been meeting for months. Ms. Kain said that every Chair of the sub-committee’s was either a member of the Commission or the Executive Director of the Commission and that was a decision of the Chair of the Commission.

Ms. Kelley said that she felt too much time was being spent on the issue of educating families. Ms. Kain explained that educating families has been one of the issues discussed by this sub-committee and that the recommendations they made on March 6th did not involve parent education. Ms. Kain said that since Ms. Kelley was absent for several meetings that she may not be aware of other issues discussed but she was at the meeting regarding the recommendations being brought forth to the Commission. Ms. Kain also said that while this sub-committee has raised a number of issues, issue spotting was not the same as making a specific recommendation.

Julie Kelley asked about having a legislative hearing by the Joint Committee on Education regarding DESE’s oversight of school districts. Ms. Kain said that she did not agree that Ms. Kelley’s suggestion was consistent with the purpose of the sub-committee, which is to identify the unmet needs of individuals with ASD and to propose to the Commission recommendations on how to address any unmet needs for individuals 3-14 years of age with ASD.

Ms. Kelley said that the Commission should look at the Autism IEP Act because she feels that it is not being followed and asked what we are doing about it – she would like to see a DESE oversight hearing to review and address this issue. Ms. Kelley proposed that a checklist be developed for IEP Teams to document that the seven areas required to be addressed by IEP Teams is being done. Ms. Kain responded that if there are instances where the Team is not considering the needs of an individual with ASD as required by law, she did not agree that a checklist would resolve this issue. Ms. Kain said that DESE does Coordinated program Reviews of school districts and this sub-committee should look at that process and if appropriate to make recommendations to improve that process. Ms. Kain said she would send that process out to sub-committee members for their review and discussion at our next meeting, but again it is important for someone from DESE to participate since they have the knowledge and experience about its oversight of school districts that other members may not be aware of based on their own limited experiences of challenges shared by individual families.

Ms. Kelley said that the PQA process does not work and how was DESE working to change that. Ms. Kain said that she could understand that different families contacting PQA may have varied experiences but they needed to identify the types of problems that families have encountered to be able to make recommendations on how to address them. Ms. Kain said DESE had previously shared with this sub-committee that PQA does not track the types of complaints that they receive.

Ms. Kain said that last month we discussed our recommendations to the full commission and the issue of PQA and the Autism IEP Act were not discussed. Ms. Kain noted that no further recommendations were brought up at that time, and we may look at adding these issues to our list of recommendations but that required additional information from and discussions with DESE. Ms. Kain said this is an ongoing process, as the Omnibus Law established the Commission as a permanent entity, and we need to work together with sub-committee members and state agencies around which recommendations that we feel are important.

Tere Ramos said that she is scheduled to meet with folks from PQA and she will report back to this group.

Ms. Kain suggested that we look at specific examples of families and their interactions with PQA – what was the response they received when requesting assistance and what kinds of decisions were made on their issues.

We will look at specific agenda items for our next meeting that will include Tere’s information gathered from PQA and how the requirements of the IEP Autism Act is addressed by DESE in their Coordinated review Process. Does DESE need to provide further training to schools on the Autism IEP Act or have they done this already? Ms. Kain noted that the requirements already exist by statute and in the DOE advisory on this issue. We will need to identify where problems are occurring and why to recommend how they can be addressed.

Ms. Kain said she would inquire with DESE about the status of the new IEP form they are seeking to create and ask if there are specific fields on the IEP regarding ASD or transition and if not can they be added as the new form is being developed. She said that Sarah Geldart had explained previously that DESE was seeking to have the IEP be more specific about areas that need to be addressed in each student’s IEP.

Next Meeting

* Ask for DESE participation to replace SG
* Inquire about the status of development of the new IEP
* Coordinated Review Process and the 7 areas of ASD – Review Process to see how this is currently being addressed
* PQA are there specific guidelines for liaisons, is additional training necessary to ensure that all families receive consistent responses when filing a complaint
* Regional DESE meetings– Carolyn offered to participate in these meetings and will update the sub-committee on when and where they will occur

A Doodle Poll will be sent out to the sub-committee to schedule the next meeting.

Meeting was adjourned.