

Howard County Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities  
Meeting Minutes  
September 10, 2020

**Attendees:**

Stephanie Adibe, Missie Baxter, Beth Benevides, Patrick Boxall, Ernestine Bridges, Naysha Conway-Hart, Stephanie Discepolo, Colette Jackson, Kathy Land, Erica Lewis, Michelle Henry, Dianne Nagle, Judi Olinger, Cindy Parr, Laura Parsons, Susan Potts, Dawson Robertson, Ann Scholz, Meghan Smallwood, Janice Yetter

**Guests:** Natalie Dohner (Project SEARCH), Doris Jacobs (Humanim)

**Absent:**

Alexandra Berry, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Lea Fant (DORS), Kelly Ruby, Jemira Sarratt, Dana Stewart (DORS)

Meeting called to order at 8:32 a.m.

**Welcome and Introductions**

B. Benevides welcomed Commission members and shared the agenda. Stephanie Adibe introduced herself from the Howard County Department of Community Resources and Services. As deputy director of DCRS, she will oversee the newly created Office on Disabilities, under which the Commission now falls.

Given that the Commission had not met since March 9, 2020, B. Benevides invited all members to provide updates on their departments, agencies, or organizations, and to highlight efforts to support transitioning youth in particular, as well as any specific challenges.

**Approval of Minutes**

J. Olinger made a motion to approve the March 9, 2020, meeting minutes. K. Land seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

**Office on Disabilities**

M. Henry updated members on the transfer of this Commission from the Office for Children and Families to the Office on Disabilities. Until a manager has been hired for the Office on Disabilities, the Commission will be supported by M. Henry and E. Lewis in the Office of ADA Coordination.

**HCPSS Update: High Schools and Transitioning Students with Disabilities**

J. Yetter updated members on the reopening of schools in a fully virtual model. Students, families, and staff are adjusting to a new way of learning, with much more live instruction. Services and supports continue to evolve. The Department of Special Education is partnering with many outside agencies to problem solve through challenges.

M. Baxter shared that staff spent the summer developing lesson plans and activities for students to participate in while in work/study and CCE. The school system has purchased the “Virtual Job Shadow” online program. This is a job exploration program for students enrolled in CCE, work/study, Community Connections, and Project SEARCH.

The role of transition teachers has shifted. Transition teachers are currently actively teaching lessons to students who are enrolled in work/study. There are three pods with 12 students in each; four transition teachers are assigned to each pod and rotate through the lessons. This provides students the opportunity to interact with peers from other schools, as each pod include students from four different schools.

D. Robertson advertised the Fall 2020 Workshops that will be offered by the Transition Outreach Partnership in lieu of the Transition Fair. See attached list.

### **Project SEARCH**

N. Dohner provided an updated on the program. In-person internships are not currently possible, and thus interns are working remotely. Some work is being done for a local real estate office (assembling mailings). N. Dohner continues to search for additional remote work opportunities within Howard County businesses for the fall. The hope is that interns will transition back into county government as soon as permissible. Rec and Parks has indicated they are ready to welcome back interns. A virtual meet-and-greet is scheduled for September 25 for county government mentors and interns.

### **Project Access / HCC**

D. Nagle shared that Project Access was a great success this summer, despite it being offered entirely online. 65 students participated (only slightly down from 86 on campus last year). Instruction was provided each day; the typical six-hour program was condensed to two hours. Participation and engagement was required throughout the program. Social opportunities were also provided via virtual lunch groups and breakout groups, four virtual college tours, and virtual Friday evening events.

### **Howard County Recreation and Parks**

S. Potts announced that all in-person programs have been cancelled through the fall; winter programs will begin in the virtual platform as well. When in-person programming is possible, there will be a slow start-up to ensure safety. The department lost the majority of contingent part-time staff. The Therapeutic Integration office lost two part-time benefitted positions and one full-time position. Some new programs have been introduced (all virtual), including Book Club. Supper Club has migrated online and has been well attended. Many new people are participating in the programs being offered. S. Potts has noted that many people in residential settings sign up, but are not attending. S. Potts will offer tutorials to house managers on how to connect in hopes of more people joining from residences.

On Wednesday, September 16, 9:30-11:30 a.m., S. Potts will be presenting to the Commission on Disabilities Provider Committee. Providers will learn about the many virtual programs provided by her office.

Rec and Parks is providing child care in eight school buildings. Staff will facilitate learning, but they are not paraeducators. 1:1 support for students with disabilities is limited.

### **Family Support and Resource Center (HCPSS)**

A. Scholz shared that child care is the issue of greatest concerns to families who are in touch with FSRC. Options are very limited and families are looking for in-home support for virtual learning. Food resources and technology support also are major issues. Plans are underway for the Transition: Parent to Parent group meetings for the year. A schedule of presentations will be created shortly and shared.

HCPSS is hosting the Parent Empowerment Conference September 29-October 1. There will be two 1-hour sessions offered each evening. The sessions will be presented by HCPSS staff as well as community partners (HCAS, SECAC).

### **HCPSS Career Research and Development**

S. Discepolo updated members on the apprenticeship programs. There are 18 students participating this year in either virtual employment or in-person employment depending on the industry—12 students electrical, 1 HVAC, 5 Humanim. The Humanim direct support professional apprenticeship program was highly successful. Three students were offered full-time positions. Now that the school system is operating on a semester model, students may enter these apprenticeships in either September or January.

### **Service Coordination / DDA**

K. Land and the staff at Service Coordination are working 100% remotely. Continue to support youth in transition to DDA services. DDA has approved some virtual services in its waiver programs. DDA is continuing to review and approve eligibility applications. There is a backlog of approvals for transitioning youth, though that is not unique to this year. Applications for Self-Directed Services, which requires a separate budget for each participant, are taking much longer to review and approve. The waiver application deadline has been extended from June 30 to September 30, 2020.

B. Benevides, P. Boxall, and C. Jackson all shared feedback from the community that DDA is behind in approving budgets for participants in self-direction. This greatly impacts participants and families, many of whom are without any service or support.

B. Benevides questioned whether the Commission might address a letter to the County Executive. P. Boxall made a motion for the Commission to write a letter to the County Executive to request his intervention with DDA to address the challenges transitioning youth and their families are encountering in getting necessary approvals to begin self-directed services and person-centered plans. M. Baxter seconded. Commission members unanimously approved. B. Benevides and M. Henry asked for anecdotes from families; they will draft the letter.

### **Providers / Humanim and the Arc of Howard County**

J. Olinger shared that Humanim's day programs are not open for in-person service. Everything is being offered virtually. 100 employees have been laid off. They attempted to reopen day programming for a small group of individuals, but promptly closed after one person tested positive for COVID19. Employment services have been phenomenal. Staff has been working hard on referrals to find jobs for people. New jobs have been created as a result of the pandemic—cleaning gym equipment, for instance. Transitioning youth have been able to transition into employment services as well as virtual classrooms for job exploration and training. The apprenticeship program with HCPSS went very well. Five new students will begin this semester.

C. Parr shared that the Arc is providing virtual programming in a variety of classes, up to five hours each day. There has been a high participation rate of about 60 people. Some people have gone back to work in supported employment where possible. Others are receiving services virtually with telelearning and classes. Many day programming staff members were moved to residential. Sadly two residents died due to COVID19. There were several outbreaks in the homes.

DORS funding for some aspects of Project SEARCH was not approved, namely funding for externships outside of the host business. This has created obvious challenges.

N. Conway-Hart also mentioned the impact of DORS funding restrictions on the Humanim SOS program.

D. Jacobs shared that the Humanim STEP Program is completely virtual. Job coaching and job development is being provided via zoom. Eight student successfully completed the three-year STEP program in August. New referrals to the program are coming in. D. Jacobs noted that young adults and adults with disabilities who are employed are learning to adjust to wearing masks and PPE, but it has been a challenge for some, especially those with sensory issues.

### **Commission on Disabilities Update**

E. Lewis shared that the Commission on Disabilities will change the format of its annual awards ceremony on October 8 (announcement forthcoming). The ceremony will be virtual.

### **Closing**

The meeting adjourned at 10:30am.

### **Upcoming 2019-20 Meetings:**

November 12, 2020 – 8:30-10:30am (TBD)

January 14, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (TBD)

March 11, 2012 – 8:30-10:30am (TBD)

May 13, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (TBD)