

Howard County Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
November 12, 2020

Attendees:

Stephanie Adibe, Missie Baxter, Beth Benevides, Alexandra Berry, Patrick Boxall, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Michelle Henry, Colette Jackson, Kathy Land, Erica Lewis, Dianne Nagle, Susan Potts, Dawson Robertson, Jemira Sarratt, Ann Scholz, Meghan Smallwood

Guests: Doris Jacobs (Humanim)

Absent:

Ernestine Bridges, Naysha Conway-Hart, Stephanie Discepolo, Lea Fant (DORS), Judi Olinger, Cindy Parr, Kelly Ruby, Jemira Sarratt, Dana Stewart (DORS), Janice Yetter

Meeting called to order at 8:35 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

B. Benevides welcomed Commission members and shared the agenda.

Approval of Minutes

K. Collins-Ihrke made a motion to approve the September 10, 2020, minutes. A. Scholz seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Membership

B. Benevides led a discussion about the current membership of the Commission. A few appointments still need to be confirmed by the County Executive's Office, namely A. Berry (individual), N. Conway-Hart (community member), and K. Land (community member), as well as a parent member who was recommended in January. Currently two vacancies remain in the business community.

In July 2021, B. Benevides, P. Boxall, and C. Jackson will exit the Commission as their terms will expire. The Commission bylaws require a parent co-chair.

S. Adibe and B. Benevides will work together to follow up on the membership needs, as well as create announcements for the vacancies. In the meantime, anyone interested in joining the Commission may attend the meetings under the Open Meetings Act. Letters of interest and resumes may be sent to the County Executive's office at any time.

Office on Disabilities

M. Henry shared that the Commission on Disabilities and DCRS are sponsoring an art contest in lieu of the Commission's annual awards event and in celebration of the ADA's 30th Anniversary. Submissions are due November 30. Prizes will be announced at a virtual event that will include several guest speakers.

M. Henry has spoken with the countywide Digital Equity Group about the lack of internet access for people with disabilities and this barrier to their participation in virtual programming. The group is discussing ways to address these needs. The group is focused on internet access (exploring options through Comcast and AT&T), providing devices, and training. K. Collins-Ihrke noted that Accessible Resources for Independence has CARES Act funding to support people by providing technology (Chromebooks) and services. Their goal is always to enhance independent living. They are prioritizing people in nursing facilities.

K. Land noted that providers have the opportunity to request funding through Appendix K to purchase a tablet for individuals to use for online programming. Internet access is still a barrier for some. If an individual has an identified need for Assistive Technology, a request can be made by using specific DDA forms. DDA's FAQ on Appendix K, pages 12-14, address the Assistive Technology/request for tablets.

<https://dda.health.maryland.gov/Documents/COVID%2019%20Documents/Appendix%20K/DDA%20Appendix%20K%20-%20Frequently%20Asked%20Question%20May%2019%202020.pdf>

E. Lewis shared that DCRS will host an information meeting about the 2021 Community Service Partnership Grants on November 18 (9:30-11:30am). The grant program is being redesigned. An update on the Employment Mobility Program will also be provided at this meeting.

HCPSS Update: High Schools and Transitioning Students with Disabilities

M. Baxter provided updates. HCPSS will offer an HCC shadow day for diploma-bound students to hear about HCC and disability support services.

M. Baxter and D. Robertson have provided middle school Instructional Team Leaders (ITLs) with training on transition. They will also meet with 7th and 8th grade special educators to provide information about transition to be shared with parents. The goal is to better prepare middle school staff to discuss transition with families.

Department of Special Education has received approval to hire a new staff member to support transition efforts, specifically expansion of work opportunities for students with disabilities.

Project SEARCH interns are beginning to work at the Community Ecological Center one day a week. They are also assisting with a distribution center at Old Cedar Lane School. Interns will set appointments with families, and will be on-site to distribute school-related materials to students. Interns are currently participating in a virtual mentor program; interns are paired with mentors who communicate with them by email and zoom for work development. Interns have also benefitted from a weekly speaker series to discuss various jobs in the community. In addition, interns have been working at home (with instruction via Zoom) on clerical tasks for outside businesses and HCPSS. If anyone has work that needs to be done, please let Natalie Dohner know. Finally, a PS information session was held on November 10. The application deadline for next year is in March.

HCPSS is currently planning to return a small group of students to buildings on November 30. At this point, only seven transitioning students (18-20yo) have registered to return. They will attend one half-day each week.

HCPSS is using the Virtual Job Shadow online program with students 15+ who were engaged in CCE.

M. Smallwood shared that families have been offered virtual webinars on a variety of transition topics. Sessions included alternatives to guardianship (Disability Rights Maryland) and self-directed services (Gail Godwin, Shared Support). Upcoming sessions will be presented by Accessible Resources for Independence on self-advocacy (11/17), Maryland ABLE (December), and DORS. Some Cedar Lane specific workshops have been provided as well. She has also arranged virtual tours of a number of agencies for parents considering meaningful day programs.

A. Scholz shared that 500 parents attended the HCPSS Parent Empowerment Conference. The Transition Journey: Parent to Parent group has not been held in recent months given then many other webinars offered for transitioning youth and families. B. Benevides suggested that HCPSS might consider offering one meeting to provide parents an opportunity to ask questions, share concerns, discuss any transition issues informally.

Project Access / HCC

D. Nagle shared that Project Access was a great success this summer, despite it being offered entirely online. Project Access was recognized for its very high student retention rate—79% (HCC average is 52%, nationally 64-70%).

HCC will remain virtual through the spring. Summer plans not yet determined. D. Nagle has met individually with a number of transition specialists, and will meet with them as a group again in January. Information sessions for families will be held on November 23, as well as at the Homewood Transition Fair on November 18 (6-8pm). The annual open house event is tentatively scheduled for February 6, 2021. There is a video on the Project Access webpage, as well as the application. Students should be encouraged to apply as soon as possible; there is often a wait list. Tuition is not expected at this time.

Office of Workforce Development

J. Sarratt shared that OWD is providing virtual services to youth in programs. Summer program included 55 youth; currently 25 youth in fall programs. Vendors are providing instruction and assistance with resume writing and job preparedness. OWD will attend the Homewood Transition Fair.

Howard County Recreation and Parks

S. Potts shared that all programs will remain on virtual platforms through the winter. There is no timeline on when programs will return to in-person status. Many new participants and better participation in current programs from group homes. If affordability is an issue, contact S. Potts.

Rec Zones are still running at eight school sites (30 people total). CARES Act funding has been requested to provide sites with more sensory items and visual timers.

Summer planning has begun. COVID-19 policies, procedures, and best practices for camp providers are being written. All tournaments with out-of-county teams have been cancelled. HCRP continues to add programs on a regular basis.

The Playground at Blandair Park is very close to completion. Communication boards (with Braille) have been included in the playground. A new project at Centennial North in fiscal year 2021 will add sensory elements to the playground.

Service Coordination / DDA

K. Land shared that DDA is implementing a new service delivery model which will change the way personal supports services are reviewed and approved. By December 1, all agency-provided personal support staff will be required to clock in and out by phone or app. The majority of providers are doing virtual services. There continue to be delays with paperwork processing.

Providers

D. Jacobs (Humanim) shared that many programs, including STEP, were greatly impacted by COVID-19 closures. The biggest barrier has been to employment and volunteer opportunities; current placement numbers are much lower than usual. Pre-ETS services, Start on Success, and Student Career Choices are completely virtual. Explore Work applications are being accepted.

K. Collins Ihrke (ARI) noted that ARI is able to provide masks, sanitizers, and gloves upon request through CARES Act funding. She underscored that social isolation is a major issue for people with disabilities in general, but further amplified by this pandemic. Mental health wellness remains a great concern.

Member Updates

P. Boxall noted continued delays with the start of DDA funding. For some families who receive Autism Waiver funding, funds may be accessed through February 28, 2021. The Howard County Autism Society hiring program is hoping to introduce a cohort in early 2021.

A. Berry shared that she has begun participating in services at Athelas.

Closing

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 a.m.

Upcoming 2020-21 Meetings:

January 14, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (WebEx)

March 11, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (TBD)

May 13, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (TBD)