

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 15, 2017

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, December 15, 2017, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 171, State Capitol, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Task Force members present were: Senator Uvalde Lindsey, co-chair, Ms. Mary Broadaway, Ms. Karan Burnette, Ms. Tami Harlan, Ms. Jennifer Hennessey, Dr. Randal Hundley, Ms. Linda Rogers, Ms. Angie Scott (*for Dr. Tyra Reid*), Ms. Sheila Smith (*replacing Maureen Bradshaw*), Ms. Melissa Stone, Ms. Lisa Tyler (*name changed from Lisa Haley*), and Ms. Dianna Varady.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order.

Adoption of Minutes from October 20, 2017 [Exhibit C]

The minutes from October 20, 2017, were approved by acclamation.

Discussion to Approve Revisions Made to the Autism Task Force Meeting Rules [Exhibit D]

The autism task force meeting rules were adopted as amended.

Ms. Dianna Varady, Director, Arkansas Autism Resource & Outreach Center (AAROC), explained that children who are on Medicaid and need a diagnosis of autism and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services, are receiving treatment through the Arkansas Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) Medicaid program. She explained that under EPSDT, only a Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) can administer ABA. She said there is not enough BCBA's to meet the increasing demand of children needing the service. Ms. Varady said if the EPSDT policy is revised to add Board Certified assistant Behavior Analysts (BCaBA), more autistic children can be served. BCaBA's can provide ABA under BCBA supervision. Ms. Varady explained that more resources are needed to reimburse BCaBA services. She said adding BCaBA's to the EPSDT will create a demand for a much needed service and may provide an incentive for universities to develop a curricula in Behavior Analysis for bachelor level students. Teachers with a master's degree in Education or Psychology are qualified to take the coursework. Ms. Varady said the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) that supervises BCBA coursework and exams will be transferring the management to the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI).

Discussion of Task Force Goals for 2018

Ms. Varady provided suggestions on moving forward with task force goals for 2018:

1. Incorporate Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analysts (BCaBA's) into the EPSDT program;
2. Develop a reimbursement mechanism to pay for BCBA/BCaBA services;
3. Create a workforce of speech pathologists (SP) and occupational therapists (OT) with autism experience to train parents in the home about functional behavior assessment and positive behavior support strategies;
4. Meet with administrators from Institutions of Higher Education to discuss replicating the University of Arkansas Fayetteville BCBA coursework program; and
5. Develop a legislative initiative using scholarship funds to incentivize ABA graduates to stay in the state and work in underserved areas over a certain number of years.

Ms. Karan Burnette, Associate Director, Arkansas Autism Partnership, said the University of Arkansas Fayetteville is the only university in the state that offers a BCBA program. She said there is an issue that once graduates receive a BCBA credential, they will relocate to another state for a higher salary. Ms. Burnette said it will take several years to grow a BCBA/BCaBA workforce. She also noted that the BACB has screened out speech pathologists (SP) and occupational therapists (OT) from taking the BCBA exam.

Ms. Burnette stated that under the EPSDT state plan, families can receive parent training in their home under a Speech Pathologist who has autism training experience in positive behavior supports and functional behavior assessment. She said parents who have received the training have seen a decrease in behavioral eruptions in their autistic teenage child that otherwise would have resulted in an emergency room visit or a psychiatric hospital placement.

Ms. Kami Rowland, Speech-Language Pathologist, Hall High School, announced the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) is rolling out a Board Certified Autism Spectrum Disorder Specialty (BCASD) program which is a national initiative for speech-language pathologists (SP) in autism. Certification requirements include online coursework, a portfolio, and a standardized exam. She said SP's with BCASD certification are able to provide an additional service for children with autism.

Ms. Tami Harlan, Director, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, (DDS), Arkansas Department of Human Services, (DHS), stated that Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) has approved the autism waiver. DDS is working to amend the waiver to add additional slots and include EPSDT services. She said the state Medicaid is seeing a volume increase in EPSDT referrals.

Ms. Melissa Stone, Deputy Director, Division of Developmental Disability Services, DHS, stated that DDS is rewriting the waiver to include a reference that autism services will be offered through EPSDT in the Medicaid state plan. The Medicaid state plan will be amended to add BCaBA credential and a Speech Pathologist home training service.

Ms. Lisa Tyler, Associate Director, Special Education, Arkansas Department of Education, expressed the barriers of not having enough BCBA supervisors in the state needed to oversee the training.

Discussion of next meeting and agenda items

Senator Lindsey asked task force members to invite administrators from colleges and universities around the state to speak at the next task force meeting to discuss incorporating Behavior Analysis curricula into their Psychology or College of Education departments.

The next Autism task force meeting will be Friday, January 19, 2018.

The meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.