

## **ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM** **MEETING MINUTES** **SEPTEMBER 20, 2013**

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, September 20, 2013, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 130 of the State Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Senate Co-Chair, presided.

Task Force members present were Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Martha Kay Asti, Karan Burnette, Dr. Loretta Cochran, Dr. Richard Frye, Dr. Charles Green, Leslie Henson-Kita, Dr. Michael Martin, Karen Massey, Eric Moxley, Dr. Tyra Reid, Linda Rogers, and Dianna Varady. Advisory members in attendance were Representative Randy Alexander and Amanda Horton.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order. The minutes from the July 19, 2013, Autism meeting were approved by acclamation.

### **PowerPoint Presentation on Structured Teaching using Evidence-based Practices Classroom (STEP)**

Ms. Linda Rogers, Vice President, Easter Seals Arkansas, addressed the STEP classroom design according to the developmental needs of children diagnosed with autism or other developmental disability. Ms. Rogers introduced Ms. Debbie Ware, Speech Language Pathologist and Autism Specialist, Outreach Program; and Ms. Alison McGrimley, Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and STEP classroom teacher, Easter Seals Arkansas.

Ms. Ware gave a PowerPoint presentation on Strategies for Teaching based on Autism Research (STAR). She discussed the STEP Classroom for children ages 3-5 diagnosed with autism, or a developmental disability, and attending a Child's Place Preschool. Staff use the three-level STAR program to determine the plan best suited to the student's needs. The curriculum is easy to learn and cost-effective for school districts.

Ms. Ware discussed the seven STAR coaches, the STAR trainer, and the six curricular areas. At the third level curriculum, students are using complex language, socializing with peers, engaging in playtime, and learning single digit addition and simple reading. She provided information on the two-day STAR curriculum comprehensive workshop for teachers, parents, administrators, and therapists. Participants are encouraged to next attend a five-day STAR workshop providing a review of the STAR curriculum, guided practice, and intensive hands-on application. Contracts for on-site coaches cost \$1,250 per day for assistance six to ten days a year. STAR coaches are also available to provide in school hands-on coaching to students who fall behind in the curriculum. School districts can save money by having a district employee trained to coach in their area. Ms. Ware provided STEP charts documenting student progress. The cost to build a STAR autism training site is approximately \$15,000, which includes materials.

Ms. McGrimley stated the STAR curriculum builds capacity as it does not require a certified teacher or behavioral specialist to implement the program once participants have completed the workshops. She discussed various other supplemental curriculums used by STEP classroom staff and assistance they provide to teachers. Students receive two 20-minute sessions of Discrete Trial and one 20-minute Pivotal Response Training daily. Students participate in functional school routines, inclusion classrooms, and physical and occupational therapy in the afternoon. Ms. McGrimley discussed the goal of establishing a parent teaching component to build capacity between home and school. She presented a video of a STEP coach using PECS to communicate with an autistic student.

Ms. Suzie Baker, Director, Outreach, Easter Seals Arkansas, discussed issues regarding the length of time it takes before school districts begin implementing the program.

Senator Lindsey suggested forming a working group, comprised of members of the task force and Easter Seals, to produce a summary statement with cost estimates on how the STAR program could advance to a regional program. Ms. Varady suggested the working group discuss ensuring children with autism are receiving evidence-based practices in the classroom and building capacity to ensure curriculums are modified to meet the child's needs. Dr. Green cautioned the working group to avoid procurement issues with Easter Seals funding as they work on the STAR summary statement. The following persons volunteered to serve: Representative Randy Alexander, Martha Kay Asti, Suzie Baker, Karan Burnette, Senator Lindsey, Alison McGrimley, Tonya Russell, and Debbie Ware.

Dr. Green discussed payment tiers and the addition of a behavioral health rider for certification of DDS providers. He said the Home and Community Based Waiver should be completed by July 2014. Dr. Green will report to the task force current progress information regarding the Home and Community Based Waiver.

### **Discussion of Task Force Goals and Objectives**

Task Force members listed proposed goals:

- Special Education in the public school system is a continuing work for children with special needs in regards to IEP, restraints and seclusions, rules and regulations, and delivery of service.
- Encourage school districts to be more proactive in helping special needs children.
- Develop funding incentives vs. disincentives.
- Teach and train parents on how to connect with the special needs programs that are offered.
- Provide mothers with newborns information regarding available child services.

Ms. Varady suggested forming a small committee to discuss desired outcomes of parents and stakeholders for children with autism and special needs, identify data for outcomes, and legislative incentives to schools who accomplish those outcomes. Ms. Denise Ennett, parent of an autistic child, volunteered to serve on the task force as an outreach service to minorities. The task force created an Education Outreach to Underserved Minority subcommittee. The members are Karen Burnette, chair, Denise Ennett, and Loretta Cochran.

A "Building Statewide Capacity for Delivery of Educational Services" mini task force was also created. The members are Representative Charlene Fite, Dr. Richard Frye, and Martha Kay Asti. Others suggested to serve were Dr. Peggy Whitby, U of A; Ms. Dianne Causey, Pottsville Elementary School; and Mr. Shannon Davis, Pottsville Superintendent.

Ms. Cochran asked that the mini task force address why clinics lack adequate behavioral health professionals who are competent to treat individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities. Dr. Frye advised Arkansas Children's Hospital (ACH) is in the process of hiring a behavioral professional in the multi-specialty clinic who is qualified to work with behavioral modification and parent education. Dr. Frye addressed his joint effort with ACH on establishing an adult clinic for children and adults with autism to receive services. Senator Lindsey stated the task force would support Dr. Frye's letter to ACH going forth with the autism adult clinic.

Dr. Reid said UAMS' Department of Pediatrics has submitted proposals for funds to continue autism treatment and are currently awaiting approval. She will keep staff informed on the approval process.

Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.