

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 21, 2015

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, August 21, 2015, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 151, State Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Senator Uvalde Lindsey and Representative Mary Broadaway, co-chairs, presided.

Task Force members present were Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Representative Mary Broadaway, Ms. Shelly Lee (*for Mr. Jim Brader*), Ms. Karan Burnette, Ms. Tina Davis, Ms. Lisa Haley, Ms. Teresa Hardin, Ms. Diane Holitik, Dr. Steve Kahler, Dr. Connie Meeks (*for Dr. Michael Martin*), Ms. Karen Massey, Mr. Eric Moxley, Dr. Tyra Reid, Ms. Dianna Varady, and Ms. Nancy Wells. Advisory members Ms. Dennis Ennett, Dr. Charlie Green, and Ms. Tonya Williams also attended.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order. The minutes from the June 12, 2015, meeting were approved by acclamation.

Senator Lindsey recognized Ms. Karen O'Donohoe, Director, Occupational & Life Skills, Northwest Arkansas Community College (NWACC), Bentonville, Arkansas, to give a brief overview of the Occupational & Life Skills (OLS) associate degree offered at NWACC. The program is designed to give adults with cognitive disabilities the opportunity to earn an associate degree, achieve gainful employment, and become self-sufficient, contributing citizens. Students are taught to understand their unique strengths and disabilities, and to become their own best advocates.

ADE SPED Rules Options

Senator Lindsey recognized Ms. Lisa Haley, Associate Director, Special Education, and Ms. Ivy Pfeffer (ADE SPED), Assistant Commissioner for Human Resources, Educator Effectiveness and Licensure, Arkansas Department of Education. Ms. Pfeffer gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining the shortage of Special Education teachers in the state. She said approximately 1/3 percent of Special Education teachers are quitting after five years of teaching and 40 percent of higher Education students who graduate with a degree in Education do not enter the teaching profession. Ms. Pfeffer outlined ADE's proposed changes to the ADE SPED licensure program. Ms. Pfeffer said the proposed rule will allow non-SPED teachers to opt out of federally recommended SPED coursework required to become a licensed special education teacher if the teacher can pass the requisite Praxis test. Teachers will be required to complete 3-hours of coursework and the SPED 101 Academy. She said currently eight Universities offer the K-12 first time Special Education licensure program.

Representative Broadaway requested ADE statistics on the number of children with special needs who are being home-schooled.

Review Special Education Rules Worksheet

Ms. Cassie Howell, Staff Attorney, Arkansas Disabilities Rights Council, was recognized. Ms. Howell addressed concerns her agency receives from disability advocates and parents with special needs children regarding ADE's proposed changes to lessen SPED licensure and the ongoing issues with their child's school not providing adequate special education services.

Statewide Home and Community Based Services Waiver (HCBS) Settings Transition Plan

Ms. Shelly Lee, Assistant Director for Quality Assurance, Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Arkansas Department of Human Services, was recognized to give an overview regarding Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS's) final rule defining HCBS settings. Ms. Lee said DDS made on-site visits to individuals receiving HCB services and worked with DD Providers to make certain each HCBS recipient's setting optimizes individual initiative, autonomy, and independence in making life choices as outlined in CMS's final rule. DDS submitted their 5-year state plan to CMS and is posted on CMS's website. DDS is waiting for CMS's approval.

Senator Lindsey recognized Ms. Carol Sherman, parent of an adult child with a developmental disability and lives in a Human Development Center. Ms. Sherman said she objects to the Federal final rule because it denigrates continuum of care for the developmental disabled population and she feels it's a terrible overreach of the Federal government to dictate a states disability programs.

Meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.