

**ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**NOVEMBER 8, 2018**

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Thursday, November 8, 2018, at 2:00 p.m., in Room 171, State Capitol, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Task Force members present were: Senator Keith Ingram and Representative Justin Boyd, co-chairs; Ms. Karan Burnette, Ms. Tami Harlan, Ms. Jennifer Hennessey, Dr. Steve Kahler, Dr. Angela Scott, Ms. Melissa Stone, Ms. Lisa Tyler, Ms. Dianna Varady, and Ms. Nancy Wells.

Senator Ingram called the meeting to order. Senator Ingram welcomed guests who were invited by Ms. Nancy Wells and are students of her AbleTalks autism program.

**Adoption of Minutes from January 19, 2018 [Exhibit C]**

The minutes from January 19, 2018, were approved by acclamation.

**Discussion on Possible Items for the 2019 Legislative Agenda**

1. Develop a Master's level program using scholarship funds to incentivize ABA graduates to stay in the state and work in underserved areas over a certain number of years. Teachers and other paraprofessionals wanting to increase their credentials to become ABA certified would also qualify for the scholarship.
2. Collect data on the number of school districts that are following the seclusion and restraint guidelines.
3. Collect data from Disability Rights Arkansas regarding the number of phone calls received from families needing assistance with issues related to their autistic child and the school.
4. Collect data on the number of families who are homeschooling because of issues between the school and their autistic child.

**Discussion of Goals for 2019-2020**

1. Ideas on how to improve on early identification and diagnosis.
2. Having the workforce and infrastructure in place to provide recommended services.
3. Easier access for families to receive services.
4. How to connect AHEX's and ABA team of professionals to build capacity in rural areas.
5. Need better regulations to use telemedicine as a diagnostic tool in delivering autism services in rural areas.
6. Language issues in the Medicaid state plan on how Psychologists bill autism assessments.

**Ms. Melissa Stone** explained DHS is working to get the Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) codes running so Psychologists can bill ABA therapy under the EPSDT state plan. MMIS should go into effect by July 1, 2019.

**Ms. Lisa Tyler** introduced Mr. Matthew Sewell, the new Associate Director, Special Education, Arkansas Department of Education. Ms. Tyler said Mr. Sewell will replace her on the autism task force. Ms. Tyler stated she is now director of Student Support Services at the Department of Education.

**Dr. Steve Kahler** announced he will be retiring from Children's Hospital at the end of June 2019. He said the autism specialty clinic at Children's Hospital has been discontinued and efforts are being expanded within the hospital's Department of Pediatrics to reach more families throughout the state needing autism services.

**Ms. Kami Rowland**, Speech-Language Pathologist, Hall High School, and past president of the Arkansas Speech-Language-hearing Association (ArkSHA) was recognized. Ms. Rowland said ArkSHA held their yearly conference and gave a free session for School Resource Officers (SRO) in the state regarding a new program called Spectrum Shield: ASD Safety with Law Enforcement. The program is designed to help SRO's communicate better with autism students.

The meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m.