

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 15, 2013

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, November 15, 2013, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 151 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. Charlie Green, Ms. Leslie Henson-Kita, Karen Massey, Kay Michael, Eric Moxley, Dr. Tyra Reid, and Linda Rogers.

Amanda Horton, advisory member, was also in attendance.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order. The minutes from the October 25, 2013, Autism meeting were approved by acclamation.

Proposed Development of the Center for Rural Education in Autism and Related Disabilities

Dr. Peggy Schaefer Whitby, Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of the Autism Certificate Programs at the University of Arkansas Fayetteville, stated she is a special education teacher. Her work focuses on helping teachers implement best practices using applied behavior procedures in a school classroom setting for children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or other developmental disabilities. Dr. Whitby gave a PowerPoint presentation on the autism programs being offered to teachers at the university. The Autism Graduate Certificate program is a five course sequence offered at a masters level. Teachers can take the coursework and embed them into a masters degree specializing in ASD. Teachers seeking an Education Specialist (Ed.S.) or Doctorate can also specialize in ASD.

The Board Certified Behavior Analysis (BCBA) certificate is another program the university offers to teachers who have a master's degree in Education, Psychology, or Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). The BCBA program is a six course sequence and is approved by the BCBA National Board. Teachers must have 1,500 clinical hours to become a BCBA. The program is on-line with real-time lectures.

Dr. Whitby said the university received federal funding to open an Applied Behavior Analysis Family Service and Research clinic for families who are unable to afford ABA services for their autistic child. The clinic provides a classroom setting for autistic children between eight and twelve years of age under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Gartin, University Professor Special Education, and Dr. Whitby. She said parents are required to observe and take part in their child's clinic sessions and also receive educational materials and lesson plans to use at home. Currently five children are receiving ABA therapy at the clinic. The university received a Project Connect grant to use over a two-year period to fund child development resource guides and a hotline number for families who think their child displays signs of a developmental delay or need help with disability services. Dr. Whitby explained the benefits of using Telehealth as a wireless tool to reach underserved communities across the state where families do not have information or support regarding autism services. She said the autism symposium is another tool for parents and professionals can gain information about how to access autism information. Dr. Whitby said much work is needed to build an infrastructure such as a main autism center and four satellite centers with highly trained autism professionals who can connect autism resources to families across the state needing assistance.

Senator Lindsey suggested the task force **work on developing a line-item to implement an autism model for quality ASD services.**

Subcommittee Reports

Ms. Baker gave a report from the Evidence-Based Classroom Strategies Subcommittee meetings. Ms. Baker explained the work of the subcommittee is based on their mission statement of how to provide high quality evidence-based intervention with an emphasis on ABA strategies and curriculum that instructs teachers on how to participate in a student's inclusive activities, school, and community. The subcommittee assignments include developing a needs assessment, determine which school districts have a Pre-K program that transitions into an elementary program, which school districts have a solid secondary program, what types of autism training have school districts received and any barriers from implementing an autism training curriculum.

Ms. April Higgins, parent of an autistic child, explained the difficulties with the school keeping her teenage son on portfolio assessment instead of preparing him for the skills needed to receive a diploma, apply for a secondary education and employment.

Meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.