

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 17, 2016

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, June 17, 2016, at 1:00 p.m., in Room 151, State Capitol, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Task Force members present were: Senator Uvalde Lindsey, Ms. Jennifer Belt, Mr. Seth Blomeley, Ms. Karan Burnette, Mr. Jared Hogue (*for Ms. Lisa Haley*), Dr. Bruce Schratz (*for Ms. Diane Holitik*), Dr. Steve Kahler, Ms. Karen Massey, Dr. Tyra Reid, Ms. Linda Rogers, Mr. Forrest Steele (*for Ms. Melissa Stone*), and Ms. Dianna Varady. Advisory member Dr. Charlie Green also attended.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order.

Adoption of Minutes from March 18, 2016 [Exhibit C]

The minutes from March 18, 2016, were approved by acclamation.

Discussion on Purchase of Task Force Signage to be used at Various Venues

Dr. Kahler made the motion to allow the Arkansas Autism and Resource Outreach Center (AAROC) use of the Autism Task Force name and the Arkansas seal on a table runner. Karan Burnette seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Discussion on Autism Medicaid Waiver Program

Ms. Burnette said the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) and the Division of Medical Services (DMS) are still negotiating with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to agree on an amendment adding autism services into the state Medicaid plan rather than through a waiver. CMS will only approve extensions of the current waiver in 90-day increments while negotiations are underway. The deadline for the current extension expires the end of June, 2016. Another extension has been requested through the end of September, 2016, but CMS has not responded. Currently there are 49 children on the waiver list.

Discussion on Improving Professional Development

Ms. Burnette suggested that one way to provide autism training and technical support for parents, school educators and professionals is to create autism satellite sites around the state and hire a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and a parent liaison to staff the centers and provide training and technical assistance.

Ms. Varady explained one of the projects she works on, *Including Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs*, is a six hour training course that provides information on the history of Inclusion, the benefits of Inclusion for children with and without disabilities, and strategies that include children with disabilities in early childhood programs. She said Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative contacted her to schedule five workshops. Arch Ford's goal is to become a train-the-trainer model on Inclusion. Ms. Varady hopes Arch Ford will offer training to help parents better understand how the programs work.

Ms. Massey said some parents feel less intimidated having their child's speech therapist come to their home rather than taking their child to the Cooperative training site. Therapists send a video home with the child showing how speech therapy is applied. They hope this will encourage parents to bring their child to the site and become involved in their child's training sessions.

Ms. Rogers said Easter Seals outreach team encourages parents to become involved in their child's therapy training sessions and offer programs to help parents continue the sessions at home.

Senator Lindsey explained how an elementary school is using a home away from home approach to encourage parents to be more involved in their child's education. The school installed a commercial washer and dryer for parents to wash their clothes free of charge. The child receives much needed after school tutoring while the parents take professional development classes. The school also installed lockers for children to store a change of clothes.

Dr. Reid gave an update on UAMS' Community-Based Autism Liaison and Treatment (CoBALT) project. UAMS received funding to sustain the CoBALT project going forward. UAMS is planning to train three more diagnostic teams. She said CoBALT teams have requested more intensive fidelity training. Dr. Reid said they have held several telemedicine classes but it is an ongoing challenge trying to schedule future classes around doctors and therapists work schedules.

Best Buddies Arkansas

Dr. Angela Kremers, State Director, and Ms. Lisa Derx, Vice President, Best Buddies Arkansas, were recognized to give a PowerPoint presentation regarding Best Buddies Arkansas Program. Ms. Derx stated Best Buddies is a non-profit organization founded in 1989 by Anthony Shriver. The Program is designed to pair one-to-one friendships between people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The program is funded through special events and private donations. There are nine states that participate in Best Buddies jobs program. Currently, Best Buddies Arkansas does not offer the program.

Dr. Kremer said Best Buddies opened its Arkansas office in 2015, with 15 Chapters impacting nine cities and nine counties in the state. Currently 3,000 children and adults with IDD in the state participate in the program. There is no cost to middle and junior high schools to participate. There is a \$350 annual cost for high schools and colleges to participate. The funds help provide operational support and offer financial support to send Chapter leaders to the National Best Buddies Leadership conferences. Schools interested in starting a Chapter must have an advisory team that includes a school superintendant or principal, a special education teacher, and a general education teacher.

Ms. Pamela Ausburn, parent of a child with IDD and a participant in the Best Buddies program, explained how the program has provided her child with opportunities to develop lasting friendships and engage in social events.

Ms. Ranell Poe, Best Buddies Chapter advisor and Special Education teacher at Bryant High School, explained how Best Buddies has partnered with Bryant school sporting events. Over 30 students with and without IDD participate in the program.

Ms. Briana Washington, a young adult with IDD and a Best Buddies Ambassador, explained how being involved in the program has changed her life and taught her how to self-advocate through writing and public speaking.

With there being no further business the meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.