

ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM
MEETING
DECEMBER 18, 2009

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, December 18, 2009 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 130, State Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Senator Mary Anne Salmon and Representative Uvalde Lindsey, Co-Chairs, presided.

Task Force members present were Senator Mary Anne Salmon, Representative Uvalde Lindsey, Mr. Jay Bradford, Ms. Maureen Bradshaw, Ms. Karan Burnette, Dr. Loretta Cochran, Dr. Charlie Green, Ms. Marjorie Greenberg, Ms. Marcia Harding, Dr. Jill James, Ms. Suzie Baker, Director, Easter Seals, sitting in for Ms. Sharon Moone-Jochums, Dr. Steve Kahler, Ms. Leslie Henson-Kita, Ms. Tina Krummel, Ms. Karen Massey, Mr. Eric Moxley, Dr. Tyra Reid, and Ms. Dianna Varady.

Representative Lindsey opened the meeting. The minutes of the November 20, 2009 Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism meeting were approved by acclamation.

Ms. Varady was recognized. She announced that the results of the CDC ADDM report is due to be released. Nationally, ASD has risen from 1 in 150 to 1 in 110. There was a significant increase in boys from 1 in 93 to 1 in 80.

Ms. Marcia Harding, Associate Director, Special Education, Arkansas Department of Education, was recognized. She gave a powerpoint presentation examining the professional development opportunities for teachers and staff in public schools regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder and the school districts use of these programs. She explained how the Centralized Intake and Referral Consultant Unified Intervention Team (CIRCUIT) is a centralized referral system for students available to parents, school personnel, or anyone who has a need to seek problem solving assistance regarding a student's education, not only autistic students but any category of disability. CIRCUIT has assisted 297 districts and other agencies in the state. Services available through CIRCUIT are BICS, ESO, ESVI, EARS, POISE, TCC, and ARLEARN. CIRCUIT can be accessed through the Department of Education web site.

There are fifteen Educational Services Cooperatives in the state that assist districts and pre-school programs. Funding was provided for teacher training centers with technology for video or satellite broadcast statewide. Currently the Cooperatives use web cast allowing teachers to stay in their classroom and not drive to a centralized location. There are a broad range of tools and available technology that Cooperatives are using in their professional development.

The Department of Education is in it's sixth year using training and positive behavioral support systems. ADE is in their third year working with response to intervention for children presenting behavior issues, and in the fifth year of CIRCUIT and intensive literacy initiative. Progress has been steady each year with the children's benchmarks. ADE is in the eighth year implementing school base mental health services. ADE continues providing high quality training for those state service providers bringing the TA to school districts and doing the professional development for school

personnel. ADE added highly qualified providers who have BCBA board certification in behavioral analysis and eighteen early childhood behavior consultants serving the three to five year olds.

Ms. Harding explained Department of Education's goal is to provide equal opportunity access to high quality services regardless of where a child lives in the state. To ensure free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment which is always challenging in a rural state. Her objectives to reach that goal include continuing what they are doing and scale up those efforts to develop and increase local capacity by impacting districts with the highest number of students, use and expand their existing network, continue to support CIRCUIT and the services that are available, support state consultant network, increase staff capacity, provide state funds to support the network, and increase model site programs.

Recent data shows that forty-nine districts each have 10 to 145 students with ASD which is approximately 1580 students. 133 districts each have 2 to 9 students for a total of 575 students, and 35 districts have identified 1 student. If those districts receive training, it will impact the largest number of children.

Ms. Harding explained in her handout additional autism specific training from 2008-2010. This handout compiled a list of training classes, dates, location, and the number of hours the course offered.

Ms. Harding feels the school's zero tolerance for misbehaving has not been in the best interest of children who's behavior is associated with their disability. She explained how her department is working on legislation to develop an appropriate policy regarding use of restraints and seclusion. The difficulty in requiring additional teacher training is getting the release time, because the sixty hours of continuing education that is currently required does not offer training on disabilities.

Ms. Maureen Bradshaw, Coordinator for the Behavior Consultants, Arkansas Department of Education explained the Co-op's are used for regionally based training for Early Childhood Behavior Consultants and School-Age Behavior Consultants. They also try to do the same training in each area for local access.

Representative Lindsey requested addresses and contact information for advocacy groups to be posted on the website so parents of autistic children receive help.

Ms. Varady explained due to understaffing, Protection and Advocacy organizations are overwhelmed with cases of children and by the time the organization can help a family, it's already become a crisis.

Dr. Charlie Green explained that DDS has a network of providers who provide direct services. DDS does not train providers nor require the providers to perform advocacy services. The providers do that on their own. He feels network providers do an excellent job providing community resources and services for families with disabilities.

Ms. Carol Reynolds, grandmother of a eleven year old child diagnosed with autism addressed the Task Force. Her handout explained how his behaviors manifested by his autism led to felony charges brought by the school for injuring staff members while attempting to restrain him for behavior, that could have been prevented with positive strategies. Due to fear that he would be taken away from his

family, he was placed on home bound schooling. She feels teachers need to be trained on the use of positive behavior strategies and eliminate the use of restraints and at no time should staff members be allowed to call the police on a child who is experiencing behaviors manifested by his disability.

Ms. Karen White, mother of a child with Autism is concerned that the Department of Education is unaware that the school district her child attends is using a vacant school building to house children with disabilities. She feels there's not sufficient monitoring of the local districts.

Dusty Maxwell, Pathfinder, Inc., explained the Attorney General has the authority to prosecute individuals who abuse Medicaid precipitants.

Ms. Ronissa Adams, mother of a child with Autism, High Functioning, explained in her handout how school districts should provide services for children with disabilities without the parent having to fight for it.

Senator Salmon requested Dr. Harding provide salaries on the staff who do annual monitoring of school districts.

Ms. Tina Krummel explained in her handout obstacles she encountered between her child who is autistic and the school district.

Next meeting date scheduled for March 20, 2010.

Meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.