

**Education and Employment Committee Agenda**

Wednesday, October 21, 2020

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**SUMMARY**

**Members Present:** Mary Tarver, Melissa Bayham, Temisha Sonnier, Dr. Phil Wilson, Bambi Polotzola

**Members Absent:** Chris Rodriguez, Brenda Cosse

**Attendees:** Dr. Kelli Peterson (LDOE), Jill Egle, Roslyn Hymel, Michael Billings, Kristie Curtis, Julie Folse, Kathleen Cannino, Charlie Michel, Tamara Crane, Mylinda Elliot, Kelly Monroe, Angela Montgomery, Lisa Phillips, Nicole Flores, Corhonda Corley, Tiffany Rainwater, Tommy Comeaux, Nicole Banks, Susan Riehn, Karen Artus

**Staff:** Marilee Andrews, Halie Belin, Hannah Jenkins, Brenton Andrus

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 AM.

Chairperson Mary Tarver reads meeting rules and protocols.

**MOTION PASSED.** A motion to approve the July 2020 EE Committee Summary made by Bambi Polotzola, seconded by Melissa Bayham, passed without objection, no abstentions.

**Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS)**

Melissa Bayham of Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) provided updates on LRS and the impact of COVID-19. LRS offices are now open to the public, some by appointment only. If a consumer does need to meet with LRS at an LRS office, they are able to do so. Virtual appointments are also available. They are starting to see applications increase, indicating things are moving in a positive direction. In March and April applications had decreased due to COVID.

LSU HDC is receiving customized employment training by the University of South Florida and LSU HDC staff has completed all online training modules. Final piece of training includes a select group of staff with mentoring and technical assistance.

Re: preemployment transition services, schools vary re: these services because different schools have different COVID protocols, but LRS is collaborating to provide preemployment transition services.

Public and committee members discussed training via MGNA. Kelly Monroe with the Arc of Baton Rouge is looking to send people to MS to for MGNA for both discovery and job development. It would be important to know if this is accepted. Angela Montgomery with LRS explained if it is going toward certification, it would be accepted.

## **Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)**

Dr. Kelli Peterson (LDOE) provided updates on Louisiana Department of Education and impact of COVID-19 on special education. LDOE has put out several components of guidance, including special education guidance documents with guiding principles for virtual, traditional, and hybrid learning.

Dr. Peterson shared high cost services grant to serve students with most challenging needs is happening now.

Dr. Peterson shared that any school that exceeds limit alternate assessment participation (1%) has follow up with LDOE. COVID19 did not really have impact – we are just higher than we need to be as a state. If we consistently see percentage not at 1%, LDOE wants to know why. The new approach LDOE is taking is to build capacity and skill to make sure teams received guidance and are readily prepared to decrease that number. Superintendent and SPED leader of school will receive results and meet with LDOE to strategize how to decrease that number.

Public discussion re: how BESE's decision 2 – 3 years ago to open it up encouraged noncompliance from schools and showed lack of expectation for students. Dr. Peterson will look at historical perspective of schools out of compliance and any relation to BESE making that decision to open it back up.

Public comment noted that schools failing children with disabilities, but school board was not receptive to looking at improvement plan. School are making kids earn way out of inclusive classroom, instead of starting with least restrictive environment. There seems to be no accountability. Asking for perspective or suggestion. Dr. Peterson suggests grievance process to get help if not being received well by school or other avenues.

Public comment noted that Dr. Peterson did not mention anything related to transparency, inclusion, and accountability. What is LDOE doing to address that as it relates to our DD community? What is LDOE doing to ensure children with disabilities are not disproportionately targeted and affected by school systems as it relates to accommodations and modifications in the virtual arena? Jefferson Parish has indigenous black and brown children expelled for things that are happening on virtual school, but this is not being addressed by LDOE. What is LDOE doing to address how

children are not being found by Child Found and nothing LDOE is doing is addressing these failures. What can Dr. Peterson tell me to make me feel that LDOE is not forgetting out children with disabilities?

Dr. Peterson shared LDOE is working to understand the system in order to make a huge shift on how they work in the department. Their goal is to build a team/restructure/organize to improve and provide teachers the support they need to support students with disabilities and to hire people who are a good fit to make these changes. There is a lot of work to do, and first step is restructuring in a way that makes sense in the field.

Committee and public discussion on LDOE not rushing this process and spending time finding the right people to hire and the importance of hiring people who understand the education process instead of the political process.

Public discussion on how to provide meaningful alternatives to in-person training during COVID and Dr. Peterson will follow up with answer.

Public comment noted that St. Tammany has a tremendous back log for child find and those children are being left behind and suffering because of it. I appreciate the suggestion for filing complaints or due process but that goes nowhere and there is no follow up and it requires lawyers which cost parents money they do not have. Dr. Peterson recommends the grievance process which has no cost.

Committee and public discussion on using LDOE's grievance process and the predicament families are in when there is no resolve and anything that has to be done beyond the grievance process requires lawyers.

Public comment notes that regression in the job supports area of education is not being addressed in the states "Strong Start" COVID response for schools. Specifically, students with special needs that lost employment supports due to COVID & regressed in job placement, are not identified as a "regression." Only academic issues were part of the regression lookback.

Marilee Andrews asked the Committee to begin thinking of ideas and activities for the full Council to consider including in its FFY2022 action plan, which begins October 1, 2021.

Chairperson Mary Tarver shares advocacy agenda that was discussed at Executive Committee meeting yesterday and that will be presented tomorrow in the full Council meeting. One of the advocacy agenda items was on cameras in special education classrooms, which this committee will be following.

Committee discussion noted the concern that putting a camera in a classroom doesn't solve the problem, which is lack of trained and paid teachers, especially special

education teachers. Our state has systematically taken away higher ed programs to prepare personnel. There is no severe disability program to get certified in our state. It leads to people being in charge of classrooms that are not prepared to do that. If we are going to invest in cameras but we don't invest in college programming for special education teaching, then we are just putting a band-aid on the problem. If we do this, let's not let legislatures think cameras will fix the problem. The discussion noted that cameras do give concrete data to show what triggers behaviors in situations with students and its footage can also be used as a tool to address issues that are happening in the classroom. Chairperson Mary Tarver encouraged these discussions to come back at the next Education/ Employment Committee meeting as ideas for the FFY2022 action plan.

**MOTION PASSED.** A motion to adjourn the Education and Employment Committee meeting made by Temisha Sonnier, seconded by Melissa Bayham, passed without objection, no abstentions.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:33 AM.