

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council  
Education and Employment Committee  
July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024

CHRISTI GONZALES: Good afternoon, everyone. It is 3:07. I would like to call the meeting to order. Stephanie, would you mind doing roll call.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Nicole Banks.

NICOLE BANKS: Present.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Melissa Bayham.

MELISSAY BAYHAM: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Jamar Ennis.

JAMAR ENNIS: Present.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Christi Gonzales.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Present.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Meredith Jordan.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Present.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Erick Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Renoda Washington.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Vivienne Webb.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: And Phil Wilson.

PHIL WILSON: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: You have nine present so you have a quorum.

CHRISTI GONZALES: We're on a roll today. Before we get started I would like to remind everyone of a few rules. For committee members and members of the public please raise your hand to speak and wait to be recognized by the chair before speaking. I forgot to say I'm in Renoda's spot just for today. To help the meeting run smoothly please keep side conversations to a minimum and comments related to the topic we are discussing. For those committee members who are attending virtually remember you must be on camera and have your first and last name showing to be counted towards our quorum. Please keep microphones muted unless called upon by the chair. Electronically raise your hand to request to speak and wait to be called on by the chair. For attendees electronically raise your hand to request to speak. Once recognized by the chair

your microphone will be turned on. After speaking the microphone will be returned to mute.

Also the question and answer and chat is to only be used by those needing an ADA accommodation to participate in the meeting. Public comment will not be accepted by the Q and A and chat except for those individuals who requested the accommodation. As per order committee members in person and virtually will be allowed to speak first. Public members in person will then be called upon followed by public participating virtually who have their hands raised. Comments in the Q and A and chat will be addressed last. As with hybrid meetings it can be difficult to keep track of all those wanting to speak in person and virtually. Please be patient. All comments and questions from committee members and the public may be limited to three minutes or less should we run into time constraints so please keep that in mind. Also comments about a person's character will not be allowed. Finally, members of the public will have the opportunity to provide public comment before each vote and during designated public comment periods. The chair may also use their discretion to determine if comments will be accepted outside of those times.

Now we're going to go over our April meeting summary. Everyone should have reviewed the April meeting summary which is linked in the agenda you should have received via email. There is also a copy in your committee packet. I need a motion to accept the minutes.

VIVIENNE WEBB: I make a motion to accept the minutes.

NICOLE BANKS: I second.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Nicole seconds. Thank you. Due to the new regulations on open meeting laws we will need do a roll call vote. Stephanie, can you please take the roll.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Yes. Ms. Banks.

NICOLE BANKS: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I'm sorry. Let me start over. A yea is to accept. A nay is to not accept. So Ms. Banks.

NICOLE BANKS: Yea.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Banks, yea. Ms. Bayham.

MELISSAY BAYHAM: Yea.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Bayham, yea. Ms. Washington.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Yea.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Washington, yea. Ms. Webb.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Yea.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Webb, yea. Dr. Wilson.

PHIL WILSON: Yea.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Yea. Mr. Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Taylor, yea. Ms. Jordan.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Jordan, yes. And Mr. Ennis.

JAMAR ENNIS: Yea.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: So I have eight yeses. Zero.

CHRISTI GONZALES: So the April meeting summary has passed by unanimous consent. Now we will go onto Louisiana Rehabilitative Services update, Ms. Melissa Bayham.

MELISSAY BAYHAM: Good afternoon, everyone. To start with my updates I want to let you all know that the state plan, which is essentially our application for federal funding, has been provisionally approved. The reason why it was only provisionally approved is because currently we do not have enough people on our council. We are required by law to have an advisory council and long story short with the change of administration and things we don't have enough people. But we are working with Boards and Commissions to get the appointments so that we can come into compliance. With our preemployment transition services program we are currently in the planning stages for not the next school year, but the school year after that because this school year coming up is already upon us.

SPEAKER: Would it be 26/27?

MELISSAY BAYHAM: Twenty-five/26. We continue to gain interest in new school districts for 3rd party cooperative arrangements. Those are the arrangements in which we have contracts with the school districts and they put up the state match and they have their own transition specialist to perform the preemployment transition services. We recently completed a contract with Caldwell Parish and we are currently in the

contract process with (inaudible) School Board and Inspired NOLA.

In terms of planning for the 25/26 school year we are more than likely going to have a reapplication process for our vendors. It's very-- right now we have 31 preETS vendors and it's just very important that we ensure that the quality of services is where we want it to be. We're going to be looking at some curriculums. We just don't feel that the services are consistent enough statewide so we're going to really be looking at our vendors to make sure that we have the right vendors in place who have the qualifications necessary to provide those services the way that we need those services provided. So we are definitely looking at ways to do that. We are-- so that's my update on preemployment transition services.

In terms of other collaborative efforts we are currently working with the Office of Behavioral Health to develop a better referral form and process to ensure a seamless delivery of services for individuals in the mental health system who need vocational rehabilitation services.

The Office of Workforce Development, which is the office in which LRS is located in, the administrators of our office recently met with staff with the Department of Children and Family Services to learn more about their programs. The Workforce Commission will continue to work with DCFS and other partners to establish a better system for individuals who need employment and other support services. So there is a lot of things going on at the Workforce Commission. There's a lot of groups going on. It's very important to the governor that we have a more seamless service delivery system for employment and that that employment system allows people to get the support needs that they need. And I know when I was with DCFS back when we were, when LRS was with them I think they called it "no wrong door". It's the same concept where if you go into a one stop or you go into an office, a public office that you'll get the services that you need. So we're really looking at processes. What's the LRS process. The application processes for all these different programs to figure out how to integrate them. It's a complicated task but we've got some good people

working on that. So hopefully we could get a better system in place. And we talk about this a lot on this board just with the delivery system for individuals with developmental disabilities. Same concept with employment and support services. It's very difficult sometimes to kind of know everything that's out there of what you need. So we're really working hard to make sure that everyone has the resources available to them.

So in terms of the administration of LRS we have made a number of changes in an effort to free our field staff of administrative functions so that more time can be spent with our customers. The unfortunate reality is that we don't have as many staff as we used to in LRS. So we're trying to be very cognizant of that and be very intentional about what changes we can make in order to make our processes more efficient. And it's very important to me that our frontline workers, that the workers that work in our regional office have the time that they need to serve participants.

And so one major thing that we recently made was that invoice processing is now done at state office. Counselors still have to look at the invoices to make sure that it's a service that their client received but in terms of processing those invoices and things of that nature those will now be paid by my staff at state office. All new vendor applications or renewals are also being handled initially by state office staff. That used to start at the regional office and they gather the documentation and send it to state office and validate it. So now we have taken on the role of validating that information beforehand to take that off of our field staff.

Additionally, one other thing that we're changing in most regions we have a position called a rehabilitation counselor associate. These are paraprofessionals that are supposed to help rehab counselors to manage their caseloads. And they were the ones primarily doing the bill paying. And we transitioned them into a more primary role in coordinating preemployment transition services in school districts. Preemployment transition services or preETS is a vital program. It's one of my favorite programs if I'm going to be honest with you. But the fact of the matter is with less staff the amount of

time it takes to coordinate services at all the school districts in Louisiana it's been unmanageable. So we're hoping with taking the payment of invoices from the rehab counselors associates and having them more involved in preemployment transition services so that the rehab counselors can work with the vocational rehabilitation clients will help us to be better and that our services can be of a higher quality. So those are my updates for now if y'all have any questions. We have a lot going on.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Any questions for Melissa? Next on the agenda is an update from Louisiana Department of Education. The special education monitoring audit was released in May. Ms. Meredith Jordan with the LDOE is here to provide an update on the audit, legislative updates and other LDOE updates. Ms. Meredith.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Good afternoon. First let me apologize. I like to come to these meetings in person but I'm actually in St. Charles Parish coming to you guys from a training. So I also know the weather here is really bad outside. I can tell my internet is going out so I apologize. Am I back? I can tell my internet is going in and out. So let me start with the legislative audit. I wanted to talk about that a little bit. I know many of you guys came to BESE, we had that on as a BESE item in June. And the director of monitoring and I kind of went through the audit results with BESE what our responses were. I am going to be bringing a more detailed response timeline to SEAP on July 31st and we will also be bringing, in response to some of those recommendations, an update to our monitoring policy both to SEAP and then to BESE in August. So we'll have two responsive items. First is that timeline what are the steps we're taking in response. And second is codifying some of those recommendations into policy pretty quickly for August BESE.

So just to kind of give you guys a little bit more, our team and our monitoring team attended a national monitoring policy-writing workshop in June. I believe we were in Virginia and so-- no, I'm sorry. We were in Colorado. And one of the things that we did was we asked this national OSEP funded technical assistance center to review our current monitoring

policy and give us feedback. So what you will see is in our bulletin update we'll have some clarifying updates as well from that feedback and to kind of bring us up to that federal expectation of all of the clarity that we really need.

One of the biggest takeaways from us from the audit was that, and we hear this from stakeholders, is to have more boots on the ground monitoring in our school systems. And so as you all may or may not know we had six full-time special education monitors on staff. We also during the process of this audit requested from the legislature additional positions so that we could build our capacity and do more on-site monitoring. And we were awarded six positions. So those new special education monitoring positions, those job postings will be posted through Civil Service if not by now by the end of the month. And that is going to allow us to hold to some of those recommendations that really came out of the audit around trying to increase the number of on-site visits that we do. And so that was something that we committed to throughout the audit and we're actually going to codify into policy. And this measurable timeline actually just came down from OSEP very recently and written guidance. So IDEA doesn't say you have to go out and monitor X percent of school systems but what OSEP came out in guidance maybe a year, maybe less than a year ago was they said that once every six years that you should provide monitoring activities to every LEA. And so we are going to codify and put that into policy as well because although it's not in law we know that is an expectation and we talked about that a lot through this audit process with the auditors. So that was not a surprise recommendation that came out of that.

And so just wanted to kind of provide you guys that sort of high-level overview and some of our responses. Like I said, we're going to have an additional response timeline that we will bring to SEAP in a couple weeks that updated policy and then we'll have that and bring that to BESE in August. And so if you guys wanted to pause and we want to talk about the audit that's fine or I can go through and also talk about legislation as well. However you want to address that, madam chair.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Anybody has any questions about the audit?

ERICK TAYLOR: What was the audit about?

CHRISTI GONZALES: He was asking what was the audit in reference to.

MEREDITH JORDAN: This particular audit focused in on our risk-based monitoring activities. So when our monitoring team conducts their risk analysis they will rank school systems from low to high-risk and that is how they determine who gets what level of monitoring. And so our highest risk districts will receive onsite boots on the ground monitoring for sure. And so the auditors really liked that process, we all do, but we really lacked capacity to do more. And that's really what came out of the audit was for us to, the recommendation was for us to do more of the onsite monitoring and so we had to get additional people and build staff capacity to be able to do that. And so that was the real focus of this particular report was on our risk-based monitoring of our school system.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Ms. Stephanie.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Hey, Meredith. I'm sorry, I just had a quick question. For the six new positions for monitoring were there any positions already there or is this just like a new-- I don't know if I'm making sense. Like were there people that did this previously?

MEREDITH JORDAN: You are. Correct. We currently have six. We are adding six additional. So we are doubling our monitoring team which is really exciting.

CHRISTI GONZALES: So 12 in all?

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yes.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

MEREDITH JORDAN: And you have to think, we have nearly 200 LEAs between all of our public schools and our charters we have nearly 200 LEAs who receive some sort of monitoring each year.

CHRISTI GONZALES: No other questions, Ms. Jordan.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Okay. So let's move and talk to, speak to our legislative updates. And I want to spend a bit of time here because of course these updates are going to impact our children, they're going to impact our families. So we did have a bit of a busy session for special education. And so in schools we are going



to be enacting five bulletin revisions in response to several different acts and so I want to talk about that. And so that you guys are all aware, so we're going to bring all legislative responsive policy change to July SEAP and of course August BESE and we're going to enact bulletin 741 which is around our handbook for school administrators and then I'll tell you what specifically will be updated. Our complaint management procedures will be updated, bulletin 1573. That's around complaint management. Our 1706, which is our main SPED bulletin, that one will be impacted. We'll have an update to bulletin 135, which is our health and safety bulletin. And we'll also have a bulletin 126 which is charter school bulletin because as you all know sometimes these SPED updates we also have to indicate in charter policy hey, this also applies to you charter school. You must do this.

So let's talk specifically about the acts that I'm talking about and some of the updates that you all are going to expect to see. And if it would be helpful for you all, I think especially our Education Employment Committee, I would be willing to commit to also making sure I send you guys-- I mean these will be public materials when we post them for SEAP, but so you all can get this information too. I hope that you all join us at SEAP but just in case. This one for sure because it is so policy heavy may be a good idea for me to send you guys these materials as well to DD Council whenever we post them.

So we have Act 512 which I called the parental consent bill. So this is the bill that addressed requiring parental consent for changes to the IEP. And so of course that is going to impact bulletin 1706, right. Then we have Act 198 which I just called it a SPED bill because it actually does quite a few things and impacts five bulletins. So all five bulletins will be impacted by this Act 198. So this particular piece of legislation requires that school board members have specific training on special education which goes into 1706. So we're updating that. This act also addressed some updates to behavioral health services in schools and added that the department now accept complaints around behavioral health services in schools. And so that one is going to go in a couple of places but very

specifically in that health and safety in our health bulletin. So that one will impact bulletin 135 is our health bulletin. So you'll see some changes around behavioral health services in schools and parents will be allowed to file complaints around that.

It also changed, this particular act changed the due process timeline to allow parents to request due process hearings for allegations up to two years prior to the date that they became aware or filing that complaint. In the past that was one year. So now parents have more time, up to two years, to file for due process. So that's huge. So like you guys as you hear me talking about this you can see and hear how this is impacting our families. And so we want to be really intentional. And of course once this is codified in the policy we will be changing guidance for parents as well to make sure we're communicating. This particular act also added the 90-day timeline for SPED cameras at installation. So as you can see that particular legislation does quite a few things all at once and is going to impact quite a few bulletins.

And the third particular act is Act 689 which I called the tutorship bill. If you remember that one it actually expanded a little bit and requires the department and LEAs to provide to certain families of students who have the most significant disabilities information about how student rights change as they reach 18, age of majority. And what types of information and decisions families may have to make. So that information will go into bulletin 1706. That's kind of the high-level main updates around-- oh, and the charter school-- oh, the SEAP requirements. I know that was one that many of you were also instrumental in. Act 198 also added very specific reporting requirements for local SPED advisory councils. So we're codifying that in policy and we're also putting that into charter policy because sometimes I find that charter schools aren't even aware sometimes of some of these specific laws and requirements that do apply to them. So we're going to make that very clear and also add it in the charter bulletin. So some of these things we see impacting several different bulletins and we want to make sure that we're putting it and addressing it in all places so that it's seen by the

right administrators both school system level administrators, charter administrators and school administrators. So these policy updates are a key piece.

I wanted to address legislative updates as quickly as possible so that we can get them on the timeline and get these bulletins updated. So all of these updates they're going to August BESE but they will all go on a period of notice of intent where there is additional comment allowed and so they don't actually become codified for several more months. So I wanted to do this as soon as possible after session ended with the next BESE meeting. And as you all know even though we're updating policy there's additional work that my team, possibly our legal team and our monitoring team will do in response in terms of creating additional guidance, communicating with families, updating our, for example, our procedural safeguards handbook with any new timelines for our families. So even though we're getting the policy work done, and it has been very cumbersome to make sure that we're getting all these updates in the right policies and addressed correctly, there's even more work to do once we just update policy in terms of additional guidance that may be needed as well. (Inaudible) or to be created to address some of these requirements. So I'll pause there and see if there are any specific questions about any of these legislative policy updates. Like I said, we're bringing quite a bit of draft policy to SEAP in the next couple of weeks and I will ask them to review and hopefully get an endorsement for all of these changes to move forward even though really they're in law now so we're going to have to do them. But I always like to get SEAP's input and their endorsement on any policy change.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Meredith, if once BESE approves everything how long do the LGEs have to start with this process? Because I know school's going to already be in session because we're starting earlier and earlier. Because I know we go back the first.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yeah. And I think this is pretty standard for legislation. Brenton, Ebony, y'all can chime in too and tell me if you think different. Typically with legislation they want you to implement

new legislation within a year. So by that next legislative session you better have addressed everything from the previous session to the best of your ability. So once we bring it to August BESE, however, Christi, if we get approval from BESE all of these policy changes will go on 90-day, I believe 90-day what they call notice of intent. So it's a good three plus months before the policy ever gets actually changed and reposted and released on our policy website. So it does take time. However, one of the things that I like to do, so none of this will be a surprise for any of our special education directors, I have been watching these things with them throughout legislative session and prepping them for implementation. So this is one area of concern that I have and I'll tell you why. So if you remember at SEAP I believe in at a previous SEAP meeting this past year, a couple SEAP meetings ago SEAP adopted a 15-day prior written notice timeline. That policy change is about to go in affect for this school year. However, one of the things Act 198 did was Act 198 changed prior written notice timeline to ten-days. So I am working through that challenge. So updated policy is about to say 15-days, but law says ten. So that I'm working through legal. Do you see how tricky that is? So I'm working with legal through that. My advice to school systems would be prep for 10-day notice. You know that that is in law and you know we're about to change it. That will take time to change the actual wording of that policy from 15 to 10, but we know it's coming. That is the only piece in here that I feel like could get tricky when we talk about potential complaints and which timeline do I follow 15 or 10 in this transition from what was just put into policy by SEAP verses what law now tells us we have to put in policy. You see what I'm saying? So that one we're working through and we will have to work through advising school systems. But I know if I were a school system I would start working toward the ten day, right, because you know it's coming.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Yeah. All right.

MEREDITH JORDAN: And I will say this, the only legislation we are not addressing just yet is the dyslexia. We had two dyslexia pieces of legislation

that will take more time to put into policy and put into action.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Vivienne.

VIVIENNE WEBB: Were the members of SEAP and BESE interviewed or were they just selected and put on?

MEREDITH JORDAN: You're talking about our new SEAP?

VIVIENNE WEBB: And BESE.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yeah. So we (inaudible) do interviews, Vivienne, did not interview. So we had over a hundred and so our committee..

SPEAKER: It was fuzzy.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Can you just repeat that one more time, Meredith.

MEREDITH JORDAN: I'm back.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Could you repeat what you said previously, Meredith. We couldn't hear you.

MEREDITH JORDAN: Sure. Our committee, Vivienne, did have an application screening process and then they did also conduct interviews. So not every, we had nearly 100 applicants, over 100 applicants so they did not interview everyone who applied. And I think she had a follow up.

VIVIENNE WEBB: What was the reason behind not interviewing everyone?

MEREDITH JORDAN: With 100 applicants it would have taken-- we had to screen applicants first just by the sheer amount of interested applicants. We would (inaudible) everyone. There were a lot of qualified individuals who applied.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Any other questions?

BRENTON ANDRUS: I don't know if it's necessarily under the legislative stuff that you were talking about. But I guess at the last BESE meeting we were there to talk about the contracts with the FHF centers and I'm curious, I know they received their allocations or will receive them for July and August, and just trying to follow up. Or is that going to continue after that? Has there been any determination of where those contracts are going or not going in the future?

MEREDITH JORDAN: Yeah. So we actually met with all of them. We asked them to submit proposals to us. And we did have a couple, you all know, we had a couple of director changes and so we got some of those

proposals late that we hadn't. I have one that I have to meet with. But we are making a decision, Brenton, before our August BESE. So we are going to bring allocations to August BESE around that.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Got you. Do you know around when that's going to happen or just that hasn't been determined yet?

MEREDITH JORDAN: We will have that probably in the next week or two. Yeah, they will know. We kind of told Families Helping Families that we would get with them by the end of July to let them know.

BRENTON ANDRUS: Got you. Thank you.

MEREDITH JORDAN: You got it.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Anything else, Meredith?

MEREDITH JORDAN: I think that's it for me. And then of course I'll have, I didn't want to sort of reiterate or go over anything I was going to say tomorrow on the report. But yeah, that was all pretty much that I had on my agenda for today unless you guys have any other questions, concerns.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Anybody else? That's it. Thank you. Now we will move onto our contractual activities. Stephanie, will you update us on building capacity in education and employment.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Sure. The Arc had two in-person trainings this quarter. One in region two and the other in region nine. Region two had 22 people registered. There were, I believe, eight in attendance. For region nine there were seven people registered but unfortunately we think somebody may have taken the sign-in sheet so I'm not sure how many people went. But we did have seven people that were registered. And I do have like the evaluation data so I can kind of use that as a gauge for how many people were there. But not everybody fills them out or turns them in. I know that there were people there.

There are three trainings that are currently scheduled for August. We have region one and three, region five and region four training that are scheduled. And those will be posted on our website as well as the Arcs and we've been posting those fliers on social media for everyone to attend. The trainings do include the one that I went to in person was at region two and they had the Lighthouse Louisiana is a guest

speaker there that talks about WIPA. Workforce Innovation Planning and Assistance. They gave a presentation on that and different planning benefits, planning information. It was very interesting. I learned a lot. So if you haven't gone you should check it out definitely because I learned a lot while I was there.

CHRISTI GONZALES: Thank you, Stephanie. Any questions for Stephanie before we move on? All right. Hearing no additional questions we will move onto announcements. Tomorrow's the full council meeting which will begin promptly at 8:30. Does anyone on the committee have any announcements to make? Hearing none, if there are no objections we can adjourn by unanimous consent. Any objections? Public comment?

SPEAKER: No public comment.

CHRISTI GONZALES: No public comment. No announcements. If there's none and no objections we can adjourn by unanimous consent. Any objections? I hereby adjourn the meeting at 3:49.