

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council
Education and Employment Committee
July 29, 2026

RENODA WASHINGTON: Good afternoon everyone. The time is now 4:16. I now call the meeting to order. Stephanie please take the roll.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Bayham.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Boyton. Mr. Doyle.

LIAM DOYLE: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Meda. Ms. Tanner.

JULIE TANNER: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Mr. Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Washington.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Here.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: Ms. Stewart. You have five. You have a quorum.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Stephanie. Before we start here are the meeting rules. Raise your hand if you want to speak. Wait until I call on you before talking. Keep side conversations quiet. Stay on the topic we are discussing. For committee members joining by Zoom you must be on camera with your full name showing to count for the quorum. Keep your microphone off unless I call on you. Click raise hand if you want to speak. Wait until I call on you before unmuting. For all attendees the Q and A box is only for people who ask for an ADA accommodation. It is not for public comment. Committee members in person speak first then ones on Zoom. Then in-person public members. Then public members on Zoom. Please be patient. Hybrid meetings can be hard to manage. If we run short on time comments may be limited. Comments about a person's character are not allowed. Public members will have one chance to comment on each agenda item. The person has two minutes. Public comment will also happen before a vote or at other times if I allow it. Let's work together to keep the meeting respectful and on track.

Everyone should have reviewed the April meeting summary. The copy is in your packet and linked in the agenda sent by email. I now need a motion to accept the minutes.

LIAM DOYLE: This is Liam Doyle. I motion to accept the minutes.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you. Is there a second?

ERICK TAYLOR: I second.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Mr. Taylor. The April meeting summary passed by unanimous consent.

Our first agenda item is an update from the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs. Liam Doyle will now give his update.

LIAM DOYLE: Hi everyone. Liam Doyle here from the governor's office. Stephanie asked me to add a report to this so I'm happy to do that. The big thing for us is that our GODA conference is going to happen next week at the Claiborne Building at the capitol. We have two days' worth of content. That conference is free to attend but if you have not signed up yet you need to do so to make sure you have the appropriate information in terms of the agenda and things like that. I have an agenda included in this and also will have that tomorrow as well available for anyone who wants it. But we also have it on our website as well as it's going to be in our newsletter that's going out on Friday. Yeah, really great information there.

We recently put out a video that was in partnership with the Department of Health on summer safety, specifically water safety. And for that we focused on families with children with disabilities. And Julia Tanner, who is a new member of this committee, was one of the video participants and I think came out really well so that was great.

And the last big thing is GACDA has had a lot of success recently going on the road. Both our office and the advisory council really wants to meet people where they are. So we have been going to different areas of the state to meet with existing committees trying to figure out what their needs are, what the projects are, how we can support. Lafayette was the first one and then the one we did last go round, which was last month, was the Lake Charles area. So what we do with that is we go meet with them, attend their committee meetings. Like I said, get an idea of what their needs are and how we can support. And then what we do is the following GACDA meeting we turn it into a showcase of that areas both organizational leadership and also community supports. We highlight (inaudible) in Lafayette where we had about 20 to 30 organizations

representing, really talking to each other and kind of coming up with ideas on how to approve the area. We're going to do the same thing with our August GACDA meeting except this one is going to focus primarily on the Lake Charles area. So it's been an eventful and fruitful outreach program we've been working on. Our next plan is to expand to the Shreveport area and New Orleans as well. That's pretty much all I have in terms of major points for us. If anyone has questions I can answer them.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Liam. Any questions before we move on?

EBONY HAVEN: I was just wondering if you all were going to start up the ad hoc committees that GACDA had. I know they had like a transportation committee and education. Are you all still planning to revamp those?

LIAM DOYLE: Yes. We are absolutely working on that. The three main ones that we have right now are accessibility, transportation and planning is the last one. Julia, please feel free to jump in if I'm missing anyone. But those are going to start in September. So the next month we're going to start that. We've been planning that for quite a while.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Okay. Any other questions?

LIAM DOYLE: I'm sorry. Not planning. Emergency preparedness. I don't know where that came from.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Questions? Next we will have an update from the LSU Human Development Center. Ms. Constance will now give her update.

CONSTANCE ALPHONSE: Good afternoon. How is everyone. So I'm just going to share some information about our LASARD project as well as our Paycheck Program. In terms of LASARD we recently presented at the Teacher Leader Conference and then we also presented, we had staff that presented at a conference in Arizona on AI. And we also presented to 50 participants from Whole Health Louisiana which was an initiative through the Louisiana Department of Health at ULL on trauma-informed care for individuals with disabilities understanding experiences and improving best practices. And that group did find the training very helpful to them. So that was a good outcome of that particular training.

And then in terms of currently we're working on getting contracts for next year to support with school districts across the state. And then Stephanie has a video that she

is going to share about Paycheck just to give everybody an understanding of kind of what Paycheck is and what we do with that work.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I'm just going to let everybody on the Zoom know we did a test earlier to make sure you could hear the video. It worked when we tried it. Please let me know if it does not work and we will try to pivot from here. We will try our hardest.

{Video playing}

CONSTANCE ALPHONSE: Thank you, Stephanie. So Will just kind of shared his journey about Paycheck. And what really happens in Paycheck is that they partner students with a local community college. And so they take classes over three semesters really just to learn important life skills. And then they also participate in work-based learning services and then they also participate in preemployment transition services. And so all of that is kind of done in collaboration with LRS in order to be able to support the cost of them participating in these experiences. But it has been a successful program. Our goal is always once they complete the three-semester program that they end up in full-time employment. Any questions?

LIAM DOYLE: I just want to give Will a quick shootout. He was the keynote speaker for yesterday's Empowerment through Employment virtual conference and he did an excellent job. I was able to sit and hear some of his keynote and it was great.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Ms. Constance. Any other questions before we move on? Okay. No questions. Our next agenda item is an update from LRS, Melissa Bayham.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Hi. Good afternoon everyone. I think the first item that y'all wanted me to give an update was a legislative update. So I'm going to read a couple of notes that was actually just sent to us yesterday from our national organizations that have contracts with consultant type firms that keep up with legislation for us at the federal level. And so just some brief notes from them. So the administration has executed an interagency agreement between the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services to transfer the Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services activities to Health and Human Services. So you probably have heard me give updates that we anticipated that the

vocational rehabilitation program, which is under the Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services and under that is the Rehabilitative Services Administration would be moved to potentially the Department of Labor. I was kind of surprised by this but as of right now the interagency agreement was made to move OSERS, which is where special education falls and rehabilitation services falls into the Department of Health and Human Services. Now statutorily vocational rehabilitation is still under the Department of Education but as of right now it's being administered through this interagency agreement through the Department of Health and Human Services.

Now some of the other updates that they gave, now this was yesterday, but they said the House Education and Workforce Committee passed legislation codifying the transfer of multiple Department of Education programs to other agencies but that bill did not include OSERS. And then also tomorrow, which was today, the senate health committee was going to debate and vote on a package of bills related to education but they did not include OSERS or VR. However, there are some bills related to OSERS that are going to be considered as an addition to the package so we still don't know anything about that.

And they also mentioned that Chairman Cassidy has a bill that will prohibit the transfer of OSERS to the Department of Health and Human Services but the bill would not prohibit OSERS from being transferred to another federal department. Chairman Cassidy would prefer that it go to the Department of Labor. So I say all that to say at the federal level it's kind of crazy. But as of right now we are under the Rehabilitation Service Administration. They sent us, the acting commissioner sent us a nice letter basically saying that yes, administratively there is an interagency agreement to move us to the Department of Health and Human Services or they executed that interagency agreement. However, nothing looks different for us in terms of how we receive our grant award at this point. The people who we interact with none of that has changed. How it looks for them in Washington I'm not sure but everything has remained the same for us. So that's my legislative update.

Just some other updates for LRS. The summertime is really busy for us in terms of our counselors have to do what we call annual reviews. All of our students in

post-secondary education we have to get their grade reports and make sure they're making satisfactory academic progress. We have to check their financial status every year. So my staff is really busy basically working on our students in post-secondary education. But we will be gearing up for another school year for preemployment transition services. So we are doing a good job spending the 15 percent set aside for preemployment transition services, almost a little too good. We're kind of getting to the point where we are exceeding it or could be exceeding it to a certain extent so we've kind of had to look at our activities.

We had a large pilot program with one of our vendors called Opportunity Next and so essentially we are going to, this year we won't be having that pilot program anymore and everyone, meaning all vendors, will have the same amount of units, which is going to be 105. So it was 96 but the individuals in the pilot were receiving two sets of units of 120. So just don't think about all those numbers. Now all students will have 105 units of preemployment transition services to help them with those particular services before they move into the vocational rehabilitation program. And we also are going to limit work-based learning experiences to one experience.

One other preemployment transition services update. We do have one new third-party cooperative arrangement starting in August and that will be in Lincoln Parish. And that particular third-party cooperative arrangement partially is a product of the disability innovation fund grant through our state Department of Education in their efforts and their work that they've done to promote third-property cooperative arrangements with the school districts participating in that particular grant.

So other updates in terms of we are in the process of promulgating our state rule. So our state rule it's essentially all the basic policies of LRS. And so in order to change that we have to go through the state promulgation process. And so we've gotten through the majority of that process. We've had public comment. We've had our hearing. And so now we're just waiting for things to get finalized and if all goes well that will be finalized on August 20th. There's just two major changes in that particular rule package. One being that we basically rewrote our financial need policy so that if we continue

to receive additional funds and if we get the staffing in place that we need at some point hopefully we will be able to not require any of our services to be based on financial need. But the way our state rule was previously written there was no option. It had to be 250 to 500 percent of the poverty guidelines and we rewrote it in a way that if we get into a good position, a good financial position, a good staffing position we will have the opportunity to be able to quote unquote turn that off until whatever time that we are not able to do that anymore. So that gives us that option and we did not have that option before.

And the other thing that won't be anything that will affect anyone in the near future but we will have an option if we get into a position where we are on order of selection, which means we're on a waiting list, we could serve people outside the order of selection who just need services to maintain employment. We could serve those individuals even if they're in a closed category or essentially would have been on the waiting list. So those are the two primary rules that we changed. Some of it was just cleanup. I told you all before the department has changed their name from Louisiana Workforce Commission to Louisiana Works so it was a lot of just cleanup language for that.

The last update I'll give is on human resources. We are hiring additional staff. As you all know, I hope you all know, very thankful for all the advocacy of the DD Council and others that we were able to secure 2 million extra state general funds. So wasn't what we were hoping for but very grateful and we're going to be able to do a lot of great things with it. And so we are in the process of hiring 16 job appointments. Job appointments are essentially positions within state government when you don't have enough funded positions. And so we are going to be hiring 11 new rehabilitation counselors and five rehabilitation counselor associates. So those are my updates but happy to take any questions.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you so much, Melissa. As she stated, any questions? Okay. The chair recognizes Ms. Mylinda.

MYLINDA ELLIOT: I'm one of the people across the state that help and has been helping advocate for funding for LRS before it was ever on the council's legislative agenda. And I'm getting questions from people that I'm working with so that they advocate that they're not seeing a whole lot

of more employment services for people with developmental disabilities. I'm wondering what kind of data you have about people that you served with developmental disabilities before we've advocated for these past couple of years and whether we can start getting a report on that.

MELISSA BAYHAM: Sure. I can see how we could be able to give that to you. As of right now we do report in our report that we submit to the DD Council we do show the number of individuals that we're serving and I believe we still send that by disability group. If not we can certainly do that. But I think you're asking for a comparison and we certainly can do that. I will tell you we have definitely increased in terms of the number of participants that we're serving. Are we where I want to be at this point, not completely. We are still very much in the hiring process. We have a lot of new rehabilitation counselors, which is great, but we have a lot of new counselors. So we still aren't at the point where we're doing a lot of outreach because we only have the capacity to serve the people who refer themselves to our offices or get referred to our offices. So but I can certainly get some more data for you. That's certainly not a problem.

MYLINDA ELLIOT: And I'm looking for a little bit deeper data than just the total number before and after this funding. Like what kinds of services are being funded.

MELISSA BAYHAM: I guess I would need some more information on that because what I'll call the menu of services, so the service that Louisiana Rehabilitation Services provides has not changed. The federal regulations basically stipulate which services that you can provide through vocational rehabilitation and those are the services that we're providing. Off the top of my head what I can tell you is that I think we've talked in this meeting I'm sure, about we call them comprehensive transition programs, but they're the programs that are on post-secondary campuses LSU, Nicholls, ULL those inclusive education programs specifically designed for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I can tell you that they continue to have more of those programs and LRS funds the majority of the students in those programs. So we definitely have increased the services that we are providing to this particular population because there are more services available for these individuals.

But we also provide the services that we've been

providing since I was a counselor 20 years ago for this population which typically is supported employment services but also other job supports, job placement services, job readiness training. Our services have not changed if that makes sense.

MYLINDA ELLIOT: Okay. Thank you.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Any other questions? If there is no other questions we will go to the next update which is from Department of Education. Lauren Wells will now give her update.

LAUREN WELLS: Perfect. Hi everyone. Good afternoon. So sharing with you just an update from our division of diverse learners. So the first update is on our SEAP, our Special Education Advisory Panel. We met last month, June 17th, and just sharing with you some of the information that was discussed. We had some informational reports. So one of the reports that was of particular interest and received in a really positive way was from an AIM member, the assistant director of AIM Justin Sims. He shared with us an assistive technology accommodations update that is currently under review. So their team developed a workgroup really looking at current assistive technology accommodations on a student's IEP and just updating some of those accommodations with appropriate language. For example, I think a typewriter was still listed as an accommodation. So just wanting to make sure that those accommodations are updated with current verbiage that reflects a student's true AT need. So that accommodation update is currently underway and set to release for the next school year. But again, that was received really positively because I think our panel members realize what a need that area is.

And then some other updates that were discussed during SEAP included some bulletin revisions that are currently underway. Those bulletins are simply in response to our 2026 legislative sessions. So we had some discussion around ABA during that legislative session. Some discussion around self-contained camera viewing. And so based on a result of that legislation our policies are being updated to just align with the current bills. So that was a quick SEAP update.

Also, just sharing with you some stakeholder outreach and engagement that has occurred throughout the summer for our division. The first item that I have for you was just

presentations from our division at LASEA. That is the Louisiana Association of Special Education Administrators. And so that was a three-day conference. There were over 200 special education leaders and service providers there so we were really excited about the outreach that occurred there. And then also the Arc's Parent Summit. We had the opportunity to also attend at that parent summit. That's an event really centered around parents or caregivers of students with disabilities so we had representation from our team there as well.

And then we are currently planning for the upcoming school year. So our team is centered around field support. So offering school support for basically as a tiered approach based on LEAP data, based on technical assistance or compliance needs. And so as we plan for the upcoming school year we also have two events that we're sharing out. So the first is our pupil appraisal institutes. That's going to be held at our Claiborne building in Baton Rouge. It occurs next month, August 14th, and it's centered around our pupil appraisal teams in the school systems. So just an opportunity for them to come together, network together and then a full day of learning. Learning around policy implementation specific to strengthening their evaluation practices. I believe this is the third PA institute that's been hosted by our team and held at the Claiborne building and I think the event just grows each year. So we're really exciting for that upcoming event.

And then the last item I just wanted to share with everyone. Again, as we plan for events this is our English Learner Institutes and there's actually four that occur throughout the school year. These are designed for our English learner coordinators, our EL directors, district leaders. Those that are really responsible for the EL programming in their school district. Those are the individuals encouraged to attend. And the first EL institute, also taking place at the Claiborne building in Baton Rouge, but also scheduled for next month, August 26th. So just wanted to share those upcoming events as again, we're really excited for those and I think the attendance continues to grow every year which is exciting for us. That was my brief diverse learner update. I will answer any questions if there are any.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Dr. Wells. As she stated, any questions for her? If there's no questions

we're going to move on to the next update. Now we have a legislative update from Ebony Haven.

EBONY HAVEN: You guys are moving so quickly through the agenda today. So the first update I have Melissa already spoke about it in her report, but we are also excited about all of the success that we had during the legislative session this past session. And then she already spoke that LaCAN and other disability advocates were successful in getting 2-million additional dollars for LRS. That wasn't the 6.8-million that we were hoping for but we were happy to receive that 2 million-dollars.

I kind of want to bring up a couple of other bills that are included in my executive director's report but I wanted to kind of highlight them here in this particular committee. There were two bills by Representative Newell that we were a little concerned about. The first one was HB283 and that particular bill that she brought could have punished students with developmental disabilities for behaviors that could have been related to their disability without fully considering their needs or their rights. So we did express concern to Representative Newell's office and the senate education committee. So there was actually an amendment that was added in senate education to that bill just to make sure that it didn't conflict with any state or federal laws pertaining to the rights in discipline of students with disabilities. But we still have concerns, even though there was an amendment that was added to the bill, we still have concerns that the amendment may (inaudible) students with a 504 plan and those that have yet to be diagnosed with a disability. We did express those concerns but that bill did pass and now it's Act 539.

Another bill that Representative Newell had during session was HB133 and in its original form again, this would have punished students with developmental disabilities for behaviors related to their disabilities. Again, especially if they haven't been diagnosed yet. We did reach out again and express our concerns and there were amendments taken into consideration for students with IDD and those that have yet to be evaluated for possible IDD. So that bill passed as well, Act 617.

And then one final bill that I wanted to mention was by Representative Knox. It was HB342 and this bill we were very happy to see this session because this has been something that I think families have been concerned about

for a while. And that bill actually changes who has to prove whether a student's special education services are appropriate during a dispute. When there's a dispute between the family and the schools. So initially the families were responsible for proving that the services were not appropriate and I am happy to say with this bill that Representative Knox brought this session it changes it where the schools and not the families must provide the evidence to prove that their special education program that they have in place for that student is appropriate and meeting their needs. So that takes the burden off of families which we were really, really excited about.

Another bill that we were excited about, I know I said that was the last one but there's one more, was house bill 352 and that was by Representative Shane Mack. And this bill is actually going to require schools to allow medically necessary services, including in classrooms and during instructional time, and it limits delays to barriers to access to those medically necessary services for our students. That was a bill that we did contact the senate education on just to express our positive feedback and support from the council. And that is all unless anybody has any questions.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Ebony. Are there any questions?

ERICK TAYLOR: You said there was some stuff we was concerned about. Is it something that we as a board(inaudible)?

EBONY HAVEN: So the education and employment committee deals with all things related to education. So whenever we're following bills during the legislative session we try to follow these bills that may affect students with disabilities and inform this committee specifically about those education bills. And I can just tell you that bill from Representative Knox I think it's been a concern for families for a while now because the burden to prove that the schools were providing the appropriate supports and services for students had always been on the family. So if you're having to hire a lawyer, I know I was listening to one of the committee meetings, and one of the testimonies was that the family was in the thousands of dollars, thousands of hundreds of dollars paying for a lawyer to prove that the services that the school was providing weren't appropriate. So now it takes the burden off the

families to prove that and it puts it onto the school. So the school has to prove the services and supports they're providing are appropriate for the student.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Any other questions? Next is an update on contractual activities. Stephanie will now share her update.

STEPHANIE CARMONA: An update on the transition to adulthood contract. So technically they have done three trainings but for this quarter they have done two that are being reported right now. They've trained 29 people. They will have two more done by the end of this week but that will be reported, the rest of them will be reported by the last quarter. All of them have been scheduled and I did send out an LADDC News I want to say June 4th or so with all of the July dates and registration links. So you can still register for the July 31st one if you're interested in going to the Baton Rouge transition to adulthood. So building independent life skills and waivers. That is in the Baton Rouge area. I don't remember the times off the top of my head. I can look them up. But it is on the flier and on the registration link also.

Then there will be that last one on August 5th. That's in Shreveport. And that will be on waivers and health and wellbeing. You can also go to both. You can go to one. It's technically two separate sessions. The contractor, Team Dynamics, they did send out surveys for everybody. Like the survey was sent out, we sent the surveys out to our list serve and on Facebook to get feedback for like what days were best, what times were best to try to get more people going, more involved. Which is why a lot are later in the summer because this is geared towards students. So that's why they're in that April, July and even that early August timeframe because those are the times or those are the months that people selected. And the times are the times that were selected. And the same for the sessions. Those were all part of the survey. And that is all that I have for that update on the transition to adulthood. This will be the last, this contract will not be moving forward in the next five-year plan so this will be the last little bit of training for this one. It has changed to the next activity. It's a little bit different than what it is right now.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Stephanie. Are there

any questions?

STEPHANIE CARMONA: I'm sorry. I have one more thing. I will be sending out another LADDC News just with those last couple of ones because I didn't realize that one was August 5th. So I'll try to send that out maybe tomorrow with that registration link. I thought it was later in August because the other one for the other activities were later in August. They were at the end of August. But I can go ahead and send that one out with that registration link because it is next week. I just realized how early it was. That it was earlier in August. But I will send out the August ones tomorrow.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you so much. Any questions before we move forward? Any public comment? We will now move to announcements. July 30th is the full council meeting. It begins at 10 a.m. in this room. Do any committee members have any announcements?

LIAM DOYLE: Did you want to mention the guest tomorrow?

EBONY HAVEN: Yes. I can mention the guest. Tomorrow at 1:15, if we stay on schedule, the Medicaid executive director will be attending our meeting and he will be talking about the upcoming changes to Medicaid regarding the work requirements. So I encourage all of our public members and our council and committee members to attend because that's going to be some really important information about those changes that are scheduled to happen in January 2027. Just making sure you guys were aware that he'll be here. And he has provided his presentation and I'll share that with the council tomorrow.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Thank you, Ebony. The chair recognizes Dr. Wells.

LAUREN WELLS: Thank you. I just wanted to confirm, I know you referenced tomorrow, the in-person meeting, but it can also occur the virtual option?

EBONY HAVEN: Yes.

LAUREN WELLS: Perfect. Just wanted to make sure.

EBONY HAVEN: This is a virtual meeting so yeah, you can definitely attend virtually as well.

LAUREN WELLS: Thank you.

RENODA WASHINGTON: The chair recognizes Erick Taylor.

ERICK TAYLOR: Did they come to you? How did that happen?

EBONY HAVEN: So he actually reached out to me to come and present to the council which I thought was really

proactive of Medicaid. And I reached out to our chair to make sure that it was okay if he was added to the agenda and she approved it. Yeah, I commend him for wanting to get out in front of the changes that are coming up because a lot of people are fearful that those work requirements may affect their Medicaid or they may lose services. So he'll be here to answer those questions for you all and to just kind of explain and walk through what those changes are going to look like.

ERICK TAYLOR: The reason why I ask that because I wish somebody would reach out to us on the requirements what we can do and cannot do. That's why I asked that question. I would like somebody to come and then we'll know what we can do on that side and not all shut up in a box. If I do this I'm going to lose this. If I do that. If we actually hear it from somebody who understands better.

RENODA WASHINGTON: Any other announcements? If there is no announcements and no objections we will adjourn. Any objections? Hearing none, I adjourn the meeting at 5:10. Y'all have a good evening.