

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Quarterly Meeting
Thursday, July 13, 2023
12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Atlanta Speech School Board Room
3190 Northside Parkway, NW
Atlanta, GA

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Mr. Ibrahim Dabo, Ms. Kelly Jenkins, Dr. Amy Lederberg, Ms. Anne McQuade, Dr. Alison Morrison, Ms. Ellen Rolader, Dr. Stacey Tucci, Mr. Jimmy Peterson, Dr. Paula Harmon, Dr. Melanie Morris

Members Absent: Ms. Deshonda Washington, Ms. Jennifer Clark

Guests: Mark Rosica, consultant

Interpreters: Ms. Anne Zimmerman, Mr. Chip Penland, Ms. Lori Civello, Ms. Laura Clark

Captioning: GISN Services

Call to Order and Old Business

Dr. Amy Lederberg called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm. Dr. Lederberg announced that prior meeting minutes will no longer be approved in person and will instead be approved virtually by the Commission. Minutes will be prepared by Kurt Bryan and sent to the commissioners for approval via email. This will result in minutes being posted on our website in more timely fashion.

Dr. Lederberg spoke about clarification of Commission work, and the difference between work as a Commissioner versus work as an individual. Ms. McQuade mentioned that she often advises people that she is a commission member but does not specify that she is representing the Commission. Mr. Peterson and Ms. Rolader both mentioned that they have both presented as acting members of the Commission for GAD, however, this was previously requested of the Commission, and they attended in lieu of Dr. Tucci and Dr. Lederberg. Mr. Dabo and Mr. Rosica spoke about the importance of “elevator” speeches if approached by someone asking about the Commission’s opinion or work on a project.

Dr. Lederberg announced that Ms. McQuade has been elected Vice-Chair of the Commission and that she is now a member of the leadership team. Ms. McQuade will be helping to set the Commission’s agenda, as well as assisting Dr. Lederberg with leading and facilitating Commission initiatives.

Funding for the Commission was briefly discussed and it was noted that the Commission’s current funding includes \$20,000 allocated from the Georgia General Assembly and \$10,000

from the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund. A full group discussion will be held next meeting pertaining to the allocation and use of these funds.

Dr. Lederberg provided a recap for the process of Commission work and how project leads will present work and initiatives to the Commission. The Commission will no longer approve specific action plans but will instead be approving SMART goals. Project leads will present progress reports at quarterly meetings and the Commission will provide feedback. Dr. Lederberg clarified that action plans do not have to be overly formal. The Commission has a total of nine (9) initiatives. All of them have been approved for mission alignment. Six (6) of the initiatives are on today's agenda.

2023 Language and Literacy Report Overview

Ms. Jenkins spoke about the 2023 Language and Literacy Report. This report is restricted to children up to the age of eight (8) years old and is presented by the Commission to the Governor's Office on an annual basis. Ms. Jenkins advised of the statutory requirements of the report and spoke about the goal and purpose of this report; to address the Governor and the General Assembly about language and literacy within GA for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Commission shall make the report available to the public on its website no later than September 15 each year. The report fosters collaboration within state agencies, monitors progress of literacy rates, and allows for the opportunity for recommendations for improvement. Ms. Jenkins provided a brief overview of the past reports from 2019 through 2022, and spoke about the 2023 draft outline, which will include data diagnostic and early intervention rates for the target population of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The report will also contain information regarding grants and in-person screening events for children that are being held in GA with some of the grant funding. Additionally, the report will include data and discussion regarding newborn hospital referral rates for hearing screenings.

Ms. Jenkins announced that given new and additional responsibilities, she is resigning as a voting member of the Commission.

Text-to-911

Ms. McQuade provided a review of the purpose of this initiative, stating that the goal is to increase the availability of text-to-911 services throughout GA and to increase awareness of this service to the D/HH and Deafblind communities. Ms. McQuade currently has one letter of support from the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence and will be contacting the Georgia Public Service Commission as well to obtain a letter for support from them as well. Dr. Lederberg asked if feedback is necessarily needed from the Commission if a report or a letter is ready to go out in support of the text-to-911 initiative and the consensus was that it's not.

Currently, 66 of 144 counties have text to 911 capability. It seems that this is largely based on population size. Part of the problem with getting text to 911 across the state is local control and funding, although, it was mentioned that infrastructure funding should be available. Ms. McQuade will ask that the question of why is text-to-911 not available be put in the next GEMA survey that goes out to the counties within GA.

Pediatric Hearing Healthcare Services by Medicaid

Dr. Morrison spoke to this initiative. The goal is to change procedures that GA Medicaid has in place that place barriers to timely and quality access to audiology services. This will be accomplished by making a formal request to the Department of Community Health (DCH) to make changes to Medicaid scheduling and CPT code requirements that regulate pediatric hearing healthcare services in fiscal year 2024. Since the April Commission meeting, the working group has been conversing periodically. A draft report on “Barriers Affecting Pediatric GA Medicaid Children Recipients who are Deaf or HH Recommendations for Improvement” has been updated and revised. The draft has been sent to various stakeholder groups for input and support. Many stakeholder groups have provided logos for support. Dr. Morrison mentioned that there have been two partners that have raised concerns about the usage of the word “barriers” when presenting to DCH as it may cause offense. This was discussed by the Commission and Dr. Tucci suggested that different wording could be used, but that it is the Commission's job to identify barriers and to recommend solutions to those barriers. It was discussed that while the Commission did not need to intentionally take an adversarial tone, it may be somewhat unavoidable. Dr. Morrison mentioned that the DCH fields many complaints, but that it is important to approach DCH with the right tone.

Hearing Loops in Public Places

Mr. Dabo provided overview of the overarching goal which is to encourage the installation of hearing loops in public places. Mr. Dabo mentioned that Juliëtte Sterkens with the Hearing Loss Association of America has agreed to work with the Commission workgroup on this initiative. The first SMART goal introduced was the Commission members working with the GA Society of Hearing Professionals to install hearing loops in GA Capitol building. This was approved on April 13. Mr. Dabo advised that the revised goal is to work directly with the staff at the GA Capitol to facilitate the installation of hearing loops at the Capitol. This revision was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Mr. Dabo also spoke about the second SMART goal for this initiative which is to educate members and staff at the GA General Assembly about hearing loops. The Commission would help draft a letter to be presented to the General Assembly. The Commission spoke about the importance of educating audiologists and stake holders about the importance of T coils. It was mentioned that many hearing aids today do not have T coils due to cost and availability of hearing loops. The second SMART goal was unanimously approved by the Commission.

ASL Videos

Ms. Rolader spoke to this initiative, where overarching purpose is to facilitate the creation of ASL videos for State of GA websites to make the information more accessible to the Deaf and Deafblind. Since the last Commission meeting, the workgroup has had 2 meetings, and Ms. Rolader met with Aaron Shoemaker who is the Executive Director of All Hands On, Inc. and works with GEMA. He is willing to provide ASL videos at no cost for the GaCDHH website. Ms. Rolader mentioned that one video could potentially be a brief informational video about the website with basic content, but a secondary video could be done with Dr. Lederberg where she would speak specifically about the Commission and the Commission’s goals. Discussion was held about the current content of the website needing to be updated with current goals and initiatives. The Commission unanimously approved this first SMART goal.

The second SMART goal is to create a guiding document for other state agencies to follow to create ASL videos for their respective websites. This second goal was also unanimously approved by the Commission.

Community Engagement Panel

Mr. Dabo provided a brief overview of this initiative in Commissioner Clark's absence. The purpose of this initiative is to host a series of panels that highlight the educational and career achievements of Deafblind and DHH adults. This workgroup has considered having three (3) of these meeting panels, with the first being a more general informative session with the second and third panels being on more specific topics, highlighting success stories from the communities. The group has discussed the possibility of having these panels virtually or in a hybrid format. The target audience for these panels would be Deafblind and DHH students, along with parents, educators, and school administrators. Dr. Tucci mentioned that because these panels are education focused, the Department of Education may be able to provide some financial support for the project, such as providing interpreters. It was mentioned that Cobb County Schools could be a potential school community partner. Mr. Dabo also mentioned that the workgroup sent out a community survey in an attempt to find willing, successful individuals to participate in the panel and the survey results indicate that there are several quality individuals who are interested in participating. The Commission discussed doing the panels virtually versus in-person, with several suggesting that a hybrid format would likely work best. In addition, it was suggested that the panels be recorded so that they could be placed on the Commission's website for future viewing. The panels are estimated to each be roughly one hour long.

The first SMART goal of this initiative is to organize the community panels. This goal was unanimously approved by the Commission. The second SMART goal is to promote and market the panels. This too was unanimously approved by the Commission.

Georgia Association for the Deaf Conference

Mr. Peterson and Ms. Rolader spoke about their experience attending the Georgia Association for the Deaf Conference in Perry, GA as representatives for the Commission. They presented at the Conference for over an hour and spoke about the Commission and the work being done. Many attendees were unaware that the Commission existed, however, attendees were very interested in the Commission and their work. Mr. Peterson and Ms. Rolader discussed and answered questions pertaining to hearing loops, challenges to Medicaid coding, and interpreter licensure. Ms. Rolader noted that many teachers in attendance were not aware that they need to be tracking their deaf and hard of hearing students in their classrooms. In addition, they discussed how newborn hearing screening works and the need to administer hearing tests for newborns.

Ms. Rolader spoke about a suggestion from a conference attendee that the commission should look at potentially soliciting donations from outside organizations and companies. Dr. Tucci mentioned that in order to take most donations, the Commission would have to hold a 501c3 nonprofit status. There was discussion on what it would possibly take to move the Commission

to a nonprofit status and it was suggested that there may need to be a feasibility study at a later point in time.

Commission Website

Dr. Lederberg discussed the Commission website on dhs.georgia.gov. Much of the website needs to be updated, including the currently listed initiatives which are all out of date. The Commission would like to update the initiatives listed with the nine (9) current initiatives. Dr. Tucci mentioned that it may be a good idea to have each initiative listed along with a description of the overarching purpose, the project lead, and an email address for the project lead. Dr. Tucci advised that since this is a State of Georgia website that it is overseen by the Georgia Technology Authority, that the Commission could use different templates if they chose to do so. Mr. Dabo mentioned that if Commission members did not want to share their email address, there could be a proxy email address where members of the general public could contact the Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:57 PM.

The next meeting is to be held Thursday, October 12, 2023.