

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Quarterly Meeting
Thursday, August 15, 2024
12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Dr. Stacey Tucci, Mr. Ibrahim Dabo, Dr. Amy Lederberg, Mr. Jimmy Peterson, Ms. Ellen Rolader, Ms. Deshonda Washington, Ms. Anne McQuade, Dr. Chelsea Tehan, Dr. Paula Harmon, Ms. Jennifer Clark & Dr. Melanie Morris

Members Absent: Dr. Alison Morrison

Guests: Ms. Kelly Jenkins, Ms. Debbie Brillling & Mr. Mark Rosica

Interpreters: Ms. Anne Zimmerman, Ms. Laura Clark, Ms. Rebecca Pearce & Tricia Alizota

Captioning: The SOS Agency

1. Old Business

a. Call to Order and approval of Minutes

Commissioner Lederberg called the meeting to order at 12:07 pm. The meeting was in person and virtual. The first order of business was to approve the minutes from the last quarterly meeting. A commissioner seconded the minutes being approved. All approved. None opposed. Meeting minutes were approved.

2. Commission Initiatives

Six initiatives were discussed in the meeting.

a. ASL Vlogs for GaCDHH Website & All Hands On Approved Contract

The \$20,000 budget allocated for expenditures by June 30th has been fully utilized, with funds allocated to contracts rather than recorded as expenses. A notable contract was awarded to All Hands On, led by Mr. Aaron Shoemaker, for producing short Vlogs for our website.

To enhance website functionality, the site was streamlined from a complex structure to five distinct web pages. Mr. Shoemaker has been contracted to create Vlogs for each of these pages.

The All Hands On team adapts content to meet the needs of individuals with limited English proficiency by simplifying and compressing information to enhance clarity while preserving its integrity. The Vlogs will utilize ASL grammar and structure rather than a direct English translation, incorporating ASL expansions to clarify complex concepts. Each Vlog will undergo testing with deaf individuals to ensure comprehension, with iterative adjustments based on their feedback. Mr. Shoemaker is committed to collaborating during the scriptwriting phase to ensure accurate ASL representation of the website content. The production process will involve multiple takes to ensure high quality, with a strong focus on accessibility and feedback incorporation. Final

Vlogs will feature bullet points and full English transcripts to accommodate individuals with low vision, deaf-blind individuals, and those with limited English proficiency.

A virtual meeting will be scheduled with Mr. Shoemaker and key staff to review website content and ensure a clear understanding of concepts for ASL translation. While there are no complete examples of a fully adapted website, similar projects are available on All Hands On's YouTube channel for reference. The Vlogs will feature a voiceover track and captions that summarize the main points, with intentional discrepancies between captions and ASL signing to enhance accessibility. A disclaimer will be proposed to clarify that captions and ASL interpretations may not align perfectly, helping to manage user expectations and explain the accessibility approach. The contract for this project must be finalized and submitted by May 2025 to meet fiscal year requirements and avoid complications related to year-end processing.

b. Georgia Medicaid and Medicaid CMO related to access to Audiological Services

This initiative is aimed at improving access to audiological services for Medicaid patients, particularly pediatric patients, has faced some challenges. Despite initial success with Mr. Brian Doe in addressing Medicaid rule changes, subsequent follow-ups revealed that some requests might require legislative or budgetary changes, which may not be feasible without further advocacy.

Progress includes a new contract with Ms. Kim Cavitt, an audiologist with significant policy expertise, who has begun analyzing barriers for adults on Medicaid in Georgia. Her findings indicate that Georgia presents unique challenges compared to other states. There is an ongoing discussion about whether to escalate efforts by engaging legislators or strategizing additional advocacy measures. The Commission is considering reaching out to individuals who have successfully lobbied for Medicaid rule changes and planning for further action when the commission is fully operational in January.

The Commission recognizes the importance of continued advocacy and the potential need for a larger push to achieve the desired policy changes, which may involve additional legislative support and strategic lobbying.

c. Medical Professional Information Toolkit

We have successfully developed and finalized multiple options for early identification and intervention flyers, available in both English and Spanish. These materials, designed to be inclusive and visually engaging, feature diverse families and have been vetted for accuracy in Spanish by native speakers. Special thanks are due to Ms. Debbie Brillinger and her daughter for their graphic art assistance.

Printing arrangements have been secured with L4GA grant funds, resulting in a total of 3,600 posters and flyers to be distributed across various public locations. The distribution plan includes 1,000 posters each for two designs (500 English and 500 Spanish for each) and 1,600 flyers (800 English and 400 Spanish for each design).

Initial field testing was conducted at the Georgia Academy of Pediatrics by the Sea, where the materials were well-received. Further distribution will be carried out at upcoming conferences and through targeted outreach in rural communities, aiming to engage physicians and provide brief discussions on hearing loss in children.

To measure the impact of these materials, a QR code will be included for tracking engagement. Preliminary data shows 100 scans. We are also considering additional strategies to capture the effectiveness, including direct follow-ups with physicians and monitoring the utilization of materials.

There is a potential for extending outreach to other language groups based on community needs, such as Mandarin-speaking families in Adairsville. Continued collaboration and support from local educators and healthcare professionals will be key to expanding the initiative's reach and impact.

d. Increase in Text-to-911 Availability

Efforts to improve the implementation of Text-to-911 services have encountered challenges despite recent outreach. Letters of support from the Public Service Commission, the Georgia Association of the Deaf, and Bridges, an organization supporting domestic abuse victims, were submitted to the Georgia Emergency Communications Authority (GECA). This led to a survey sent to Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) to assess their adoption of Text-to-911 services.

Unfortunately, the survey results did not show an increase in the number of PSAPs implementing Text-to-911. A significant issue was the low response rate, with Mr. Whittaker noting that many PSAPs did not reply, which may have skewed the results. However, the survey did reveal that some counties are receiving a considerable number of Text-to-911 messages, underscoring the service's necessity.

Moving forward, strategies need to be developed to increase survey participation or incentivize PSAPs to adopt Text-to-911. Options under consideration include publicizing the survey results on the website or social media to encourage county administrators to act. A working group will brainstorm these strategies. Additionally, leveraging social media platforms and involving new commissioners might also be effective. The Commission is exploring these avenues and considering direct actions to enhance engagement and implementation of Text-to-911 services.

A proposal was made to categorize counties by population density and existing regulations to tailor strategies for promoting Text-to-911 adoption, recognizing that large urban areas and small rural counties have distinct needs.

It was suggested to leverage local media to raise awareness about the importance of Text-to-911, with two local news producers identified as potential contacts for a brief story. Additionally, engaging social media to target younger audiences and groups affected by domestic violence or non-verbal disabilities was recommended.

The Commission discussed potential collaborations with organizations such as the Georgia Council Against Domestic Violence and Beloved Atlanta, which supports survivors of sex trafficking. Investigating equipment-sharing solutions to mitigate financial constraints for smaller counties was also proposed.

The need for strategic outreach and collaboration was emphasized to address barriers such as financial limitations and lack of awareness. Plans were made to follow up with media contacts, form working groups, and advance advocacy efforts to promote the Text-to-911 initiative effectively. Leveraging personal stories and organizational partnerships was identified as key to driving change.

A former patient and friend, a cochlear implant user who has experienced domestic violence, was proposed as a potential advocate for the Text-to-911 initiative. Her compelling story, which includes a life-saving text message to a friend, could effectively illustrate the critical need for Text-to-911 services.

Several organizations were identified as potential allies:

- **Parent Mentor Partnership:** Specializes in exceptionalities, including autism.
- **Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD):** Offers a program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services.
- **Dr. Anne Kruger:** Recognized for her work in rehabilitation for sex trafficking survivors, though she is nearing retirement.

The Commission discussed the possibility of gathering representatives from various exceptionalities and advocacy groups to share their experiences on camera. This approach could attract media attention and strengthen the message.

Commissioner McQuade is leading the initiative and indicated a need for additional support. Members volunteered to assist with generating ideas, contacting organization representatives, and tracking progress. It was also suggested to recruit additional commission members following new appointments.

The Commission organized tasks to advance the Text-to-911 initiative and leverage various resources:

1. **Action Assignments:**

- **Commissioner Lederberg:** Will reach out to Dr. Anne Kruger for contacts within the human trafficking field.
- **Dr. Tucci:** Will initiate discussions with news producers from two different channels and contact Kelly Sterling at DBHDD. Additionally, she will prepare necessary paperwork.
- **Commissioner Peterson:** Plans to introduce the Director of GADCB.
- **Commissioner Washington:** Will contact Anne from the Parent Partnership of Georgia.
- **Commissioner Dabo:** Will reach out to Sign One News and confirm contact with Courtney Love in Atlanta.

e. **Language and Literacy Annual Report**

The Language and Literacy report is now in its sixth year, with significant progress made. The majority of the content has been received, and preliminary data from the Department of Education show positive trends across the monitored indicators. The report is approximately 80% complete, thanks to substantial contributions from Ms. Jenkins and Dr. Tucci in writing and content creation. The table of contents is finalized, and individual sections have been assigned to contributors to streamline the process.

This year's report will introduce a new section on CCMV, contributed by Commissioner Morris, and will focus on early intervention tools used statewide. While it will not evaluate early

intervention programs, it will assess various assessment tools used before the implementation of comments. Additionally, the report will include updates from the Language and Literacy Dashboard, incorporating new 504 data and reflecting improvements in data collection methods to enhance accuracy.

Recent developments have impacted the report's progress. Following the loss of Dr. Kenny Moore, a key supporter, the Georgia Department of Education has undergone restructuring that has affected funding and flexibility. This has implications for the continuation of Ms. Jenkins' contract for report development. Despite these challenges, the report is progressing well, and alternative funding options are being explored.

Recent legislation, including the K-3 Early Literacy Law and the Dyslexia Law, mandates regular screenings for reading delays and dyslexia, with requirements for individualized intervention plans and professional learning for teachers. These laws have specific implications for students with disabilities, especially those who are deaf or hard of hearing, as current screeners may not fully address their needs. The report is expected to be completed by the end of the month, with the final submission due on September 15.

In Cobb County, the implementation of dyslexia screeners for students with hearing impairments has revealed significant concerns. Current guidelines require the use of auditory-based screeners, which inadvertently exclude deaf or hard of hearing students, even those using hearing aids or cochlear implants. Recent legislation has highlighted gaps in providing meaningful access to these assessments for students with sensory differences. To address this, a flow chart is being developed to guide educators in determining which students can participate meaningfully in the screeners and which need alternative assessment methods.

The Department of Education (DOE) stipulates that students who cannot meaningfully engage with the approved screeners should be assessed using alternative methods. These assessments must be conducted three times a year and documented in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), including a detailed intervention plan and timely parent notifications.

The challenges extend to blind and visually impaired students as well, as computer-based screeners may not be accessible to those using Braille or large print. Comprehensive guidance is needed to ensure equitable assessment practices for all students with sensory differences.

Discussions are focused on developing practical solutions and guidance for educators. Insights from these discussions may influence future reports and legislative evaluations, potentially leading to new or revised laws to better accommodate students with sensory differences.

Dr. Tucci is collaborating with Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Jones at the Atlanta Speech School to enhance literacy training for educators. The Cox Campus offers a 25-hour module on science-based reading and structured literacy, meeting legal professional learning requirements and available free of charge. We plan to develop a specialized science reading module for deaf or hard of hearing students and explore similar courses for blind or visually impaired students.

We are investigating the creation of an early reading assessment incorporating visual phonology to evaluate parallel skills for diverse learners.

The annual report is facing funding constraints as the contract with Ms. Jenkins expires on August 19th, before data collection is complete. The executive committee has recommended utilizing up to \$2,500 from the McGowan funds held by the Atlanta Speech School to support the completion of

this year's report. Commissioner Lederberg requested the commission support this recommendation. Commissioner Clark moved and Commissioner Morris seconded the motion. Commissioners Clark, Tehan, Harmon, Lederberg, Morris, Dabo, McQuade, and Rolader voted in favor.

Commissioner Morris agreed to lead a working group to reflect on the best format for this report. The working group will include Commissioners Morris, Clark, Lederberg, Tucci and Ms. Jenkins. Dr. Tucci will be sending a link via Canvas to the L4GA platform, where a new template for report preparation has been created. This template is designed to efficiently present graphic information and includes an option to link to more detailed narratives through the campus impact report. Dr. Tucci encourage all involved in preparing the annual report to review this resource and assess its potential utility.

Dr. Tucci would also like to highlight the importance of obtaining 501(c)(3) status for our organization. This designation is essential for receiving charitable donations with tax benefits for donors. Currently, the Atlanta Speech School is facilitating donations on our behalf due to their 501(c)(3) status. Moving forward, acquiring our own 501(c)(3) status will be crucial for effectively pursuing grants and donations.

f. Support Services

Commissioner McQuade discussed another initiative support services related to the Support Service Providers (SSP). Although progress has been limited, there are positive developments such as the first Deaf-blind youth camp scheduled for September in Georgia. A condensed version of the SSP white paper will also be available soon. Despite ongoing legislative efforts to establish a commission for the blind and reintroduce SSP services, support remains limited and challenging.

3. Commissioner Vacancies

The Board currently has five members, including the chair, who are concluding their maximum allowable two full terms and are therefore ineligible for reappointment per legal requirements. The governor's office has agreed to permit the current chair to extend their term by one year if necessary for a smooth transition, contingent on the commission's decision and the availability of a new chair.

To address upcoming vacancies, the commission needs to recruit candidates for the following positions:

1. A deaf or hard of hearing adult who uses ASL.
2. A deaf or hard of hearing adult who uses both ASL and spoken language.
3. A deaf or hard of hearing adult who uses spoken English.
4. A parent of a deaf or hard of hearing child who uses ASL.
5. A person involved in programs for deaf or hard of hearing individuals.

The recruitment strategy aims to ensure geographic diversity across the state, extending beyond the metro area. Dr. Tucci has initiated recruitment efforts in South Georgia and is seeking assistance in identifying candidates from Northern Georgia, specifically the Blue Ridge and Gainesville areas.

Current commissioner's terms will end by December 28, 2024, with new commissioners starting in January 2, 2025. Existing members can continue contributing through working groups even after their terms end. The application process for commissioner positions is under review for potential improvements. Dr. Tucci suggested that proposed changes to the application should be sent directly to her for evaluation by the commission leadership team to expedite the process and ensure comprehensive and inclusive applications.

Commissioner Lederberg emphasized the need for timely feedback, requesting that all proposed changes be submitted by the end of the day tomorrow. The finalized application will be posted on the website to facilitate broad distribution. Commissioners are encouraged to personally reach out to potential candidates in addition to general outreach.

All commissioner applications should be emailed directly to the LEPSI manager to ensure efficient processing and review. To streamline the process, a deadline for applications has been proposed for September 30th, allowing for review at the next meeting. Applications submitted after this date will still be considered, but September 30th will be the cutoff for initial review.

Commissioner Morris' concern about offering virtual meeting options will be addressed to ensure accessibility for future meetings. Commission members are coordinating the announcement and placement of recruitment materials. Dr. Tucci will present the available positions and responsibilities in an upcoming meeting, while Commissioner Peterson plans to share a Vlog on his personal Facebook page and integrate it into the commission website.

It was clarified that individuals can apply for multiple positions using a single application, with each position needing to be filled separately to ensure broad representation. Commissioners serve three-year terms with the possibility of two consecutive terms, followed by a required break before reapplying. This structure promotes continuity and periodic renewal on the commission.

4. GADOE L4GA Initiative-2024 State Schools Impact Report

Dr. Tucci presented a report created using Canva, showcasing the impact of a federal grant awarded to Georgia. This report highlights improvements and regressions in third grade reading outcomes from 2016 to 2023, including detailed comparisons between students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and those with 504 plans. The report reveals significant progress in reading levels for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students and outlines future plans to capture data on students without IEPs or 504 plans for inclusion in the 2025 annual report.

Dr. Tucci discussed various initiatives supported by the grant, including new reading assessments in American Sign Language, professional training, and public outreach efforts. The report demonstrates considerable progress and ongoing projects, and Stacy recommends considering a similar format for our literacy report to enhance clarity and impact.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10 pm.