

Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Thursday, October 13, 2022

1:00 pm

Virtual Zoom

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, Ms. Deshonda Washington

Members Absent: Dr. Paula Harmon, Ms. Jennifer Clark, Mr. Jimmy Peterson

Interpreters: Ms. Anne Zimmerman, Mr. Chip Penland

Captioner: Ms. Karen Valeriano

Call to Order and Welcome

Commissioner Jenkins called the meeting to order and welcomed all participants to the meeting.

Approval of August 11, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Jenkins requested the minutes of the last meeting be approved by the members. The minutes were approved and will be updated on the website.

Senate Appointments and Budget Appointments

Commissioner Jenkins checked the status of the appointment of two new commissioners to join the team. There would be one appointment by the Senate and one by the House.

Ms. Pamela Carr Cosby stated she has been in contact with the Lieutenant Governor's Office to check the status of the appointment to the Commission, but no appointment has been made.

Commissioner Jenkins reminded everyone that the Commission has a \$20,000 budget allocation. She also indicated that a budget request for a full-time executive director was included in the legislative report.

Presentation by Ms. DeAnna Swope from GAD Concerning a Letter Sent to the Commission

Commissioner Jenkins recognized that the letter from Ms. Swope was submitted before the meeting, however, it could not be addressed due to the availability of the Commission. Ms. Swope wanted an update on the letter submitted and GAD's requests. The letter stated that the Commission could increase the financial amount, add fundraising, and offer more time for mentoring deaf individuals in the community. GAD also requested more money for tutoring and peer support as well.

Ms. Swope addressed concerns regarding the need for tutoring for reading. She mentioned that

community members brought to their attention at a symposium that children up to age 12 participating in the camp did not have adequate reading skills. The concern involved how to address literacy concerns and language deprivation among deaf children.

Christine Meriweather indicated that tutoring and peer support will also require financial support. Ms. Meriweather shared her experience as an educator. Ms. Meriweather has worked for the Atlanta School for the Deaf. Currently, Ms. Merriweather works for Clarkston High School which is a mainstream environment. It is noted that while working in a mainstream environment, Ms. Meriweather noticed that reading levels are quite low. The reason for requesting tutoring, reading literacy, and peer support is to assist low-reading students, which is why budget allocations should be made for these services.

Ms. Meriweather mentioned two examples of deaf students that have succeeded by being provided tutoring and assistance with improving their skills. Ms. Meriweather believes that one-on-one tutoring is the most effective learning for deaf students. Currently, children are being passed on to the next grade despite being properly prepared. With one-on-one tutoring, children cannot be moved on to the next grade until they have mastered specific skills that are necessary.

Scott Cohen added that a high percentage of deaf students attend mainstream schools and work with mainstream teachers. The teachers do not have adequate training for deaf students. Mr. Cohen also noted that if teachers are given additional support from tutors, literacy should improve among deaf students.

Report by Dr. Stacy Tucci on Teacher Preparation Programs

Dr. Tucci stated that the early intervention system and the educational system are mostly not providing what many DHH learners need to be successful. In addressing this issue, Dr. Tucci mentioned that the Commission could start looking at the two major teacher preparation programs for deaf education in Georgia are Georgia State University (GSU) and Valdosta State University (VSU). Dr. Tucci expressed concerns that there are not many applicants for either program, and most applicants are hearing applicants. Dr. Tucci posed questions regarding how best to recruit applicants to go into deaf education, the application process, and connecting with the deaf community to recruit for these programs.

Scott Cohen indicated that access to the schools is open-ended. Mr. Cohen mentioned that a common issue across the field of education is that people are not so interested in the field of teaching and that deaf education does reflect on general education challenges. He further mentioned that more qualified teachers are needed who can connect with deaf students. Mr. Cohen also advised that the GSU program has changed for the better. It currently has more of a balance with a bilingual wall and cultural approach. Previously, the GSU program focused on auditory input and oralism and lacked balance. Mr. Cohen mentioned that tutors do not have to be licensed teachers. He stressed that tutors can be qualified based on life experiences and if the tutor will be a great match for the tutoring program.

Potential Instructional Language Track Focusing on American Sign Language (ASL)

There is starting to be some talk about a potential instructional language track so that there are teachers of the deaf that focus on an ASL instructional track where they become certified to teach

ASL and potentially teachers who are going to focus on working with students using spoken English as their primary instructional language. There are significant differences in the way children who are using different instructional languages are educated.

Teacher Professional Learning

Many complex questions were posed regarding teacher professional learning, including questions of funding. There were concerns for auditory skill development, future or present workforce, financial support, and ongoing support for teachers. It was mentioned that these matters must be discussed further. It was also mentioned that decisions on teacher professional development are usually made by the head of the special education department and not the teachers of the deaf. Partnering with the National Association of the Deaf or the Georgia Association of the Deaf was offered as a way to provide for the professional development of teachers for the deaf.

Grant Writing for Short-Term Financial Assistance

A grant opportunity with United Way that addresses learning loss due to COVID was mentioned. Assistance was offered with grant writing to help expand the tutoring program. Optimism was expressed regarding potentially receiving this grant.

Deaf Mentor Programs for Children Over 5

The deaf mentor program is from birth to age five. However, there are concerns that there is a tremendous need for children over age five. There is no set curriculum for children over five years of age. Other programs can be used, such as Parent Navigation. Parent Navigation is focused more on supporting the parent. Parent Navigation programs consist of parents of children who are deaf and hard of hearing. The Parent Navigation program also consists of teachers of the deaf. There are currently four full-time parent navigators, but they are looking to onboard one to three more.

It was mentioned that Commissioner Deshonda Washington is the Director of Hands and Voices. Commissioner Washington stated she would be willing to work together on these issues.

Educational Interpreters

Commissioner Jenkins reported that Ms. Megan Cowan has brought to light significant issues concerning educational interpreter licensure violations across the state of Georgia in that educational interpreters are not actually having the qualifications to meet licensure to be working in the classroom. There is great concern regarding messaging the interpreter is giving relative to the instruction being shared and is doing harm to the DHH learner. Challenges were discussed in retaining quality educational interpreters and the need to bring them to the teacher salary schedule.

Teacher Certification with Professional Standards Commission (PSC) as it Relates to Deaf Education Recruitment

The Commission discussed the need to evaluate the “one size fits all” certification of instructors in deaf education. The Commission discussed not only the need to increase the recruiting of deaf employees, but also the need to create a pipeline for deaf students to enter the field of education. It was mentioned that this needs to start when students are in elementary and secondary school and not just at the collegiate level. This could also involve getting deaf students involved in

[Career], Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE).

Legislative Report

Commissioner Jenkins mentioned that this is the fourth annual report. She advised that the first report did not include any information concerning the number of deaf children receiving special education in Georgia. The Commission had very little beyond anecdotal information concerning the children in classrooms.

The Commission has been able to accomplish and gather vital information in the four years since the initial legislative report. The number of children identified as having hearing loss before they are three months old has increased. The Commission is focused on identifying deaf children earlier for earlier intervention and school services which will increase literacy. The report notes an increase in third-grade literacy. This is an accomplishment, but nowhere near what is necessary for deaf children. Commissioner Jenkins reported that in order to better provide for deaf children, hearing loss needs to be identified and diagnosed earlier.

Audiologists Must Report Hearing Loss within Seven-Days

Commissioner Jenkins noted that audiologists, when they diagnose a hearing loss, must report it within a seven-day window. Commissioner Jenkins mentioned that the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH), Dr. Kathleen Toomey, sent a letter to every audiologist in the state that the Commission had an email for concerning infant hearing loss and the number of infants reported with hearing loss doubled the month after the letter was sent. DPH has recommended that sending this letter may be an annual occurrence because it will facilitate more accurate and timely reporting.

Development of Beta DHH Website

Dr. Tucci discussed the Beta Website for a DHH Website. The website is one of the deliverables outlined in the legislation. DHH worked with the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) to develop a DHH Georgia.gov website that will be used as a parent and professional web-based resource. The landing page includes information about state agencies, literacy development, and other information. It spotlights DHH students in Georgia and will have additional pages highlighting programs like Georgia Pines and Georgia Mobile Audiology. The state school's division has created an outreach department led by Dr. Jessica Bergeron. The outreach program will be tasked with leading professional learning webinars and webinars for parents and families. The website will also have accessibility for families and school systems to request language and literacy assessments for DHH learners. The beta version website will be entitled Pathway to Language and Literacy and will be available on October 17th.

OCGA § 43-44-7 Code Change

Commissioner Jenkins mentioned that there has been a code change. One of the issues in terms of lack of diagnostics is that certain tests must be done by licensed audiologists after three months of age. As a result of the code change, non-licensed audiologists and audiology technicians will be able to perform certain hearing screenings. Thus, licensed audiologists will be freed up to perform more complicated diagnostic screenings.

Increase in Tele-Audiology Services

Commissioner Jenkins reported that there was an encouraging 32% increase in teleaudiology services in the past year during the end of the pandemic. There are many rural areas without audiologists to do testing. However, she indicated that the needle is moving in the right direction and tele-audiology will provide a huge relief for those areas without audiologists. Commissioner Jenkins reported that there will be a grant allocation of \$1.3 million by the Governor's Office to further expand tele-audiology. She also noted that there is a \$500,000 match in the works with the Oberkotter Foundation.

Language and Literacy Dashboard

Dr. Tucci reported that there was a 7% increase in DHH learners reading on grade level across the pandemic years. By comparison, the general third grade population in Georgia regressed over the pandemic from 42% reading on grade level in 2018-19 to 37% reading on grade level in the 21-22 school year. Dr. Tucci reported that 60% of the growth was largely attributed to Cobb, Gwinnett, and Fulton. Dr. Tucci advised that their methods should be looked at to understand how the growth happened.

Three Components Relative to Reading Milestones

It was mentioned that the three components relative to reading milestones are grade level proficiency levels, lexile levels, and student growth percentiles (SGP). SGPs generate an annual growth rate metric by collapsing children into cohorts that have similar longitudinal performance, and they make decisions about the rate of growth. It was also reported that there are three levels of growth rate from the SGPs. They are low growth rate, typical growth rate, and high growth rate. Now milestones can be used to look at proficiency levels, actual grade levels calculated through lexile scores, and annual growth.

Commissioner Jenkins thanked everyone for their approval of the legislative report.

Committee Structure

Commissioner Jenkins discussed the committee structure. She indicated that issues brought to the Commission across the state are tracked on the progress tracker. Commissioner Jenkins mentioned that the process can be overwhelming but is necessary for tracking purposes.

Commissioner Jenkins discussed focusing on maybe four or five tasks for the next twelve months. She mentioned that every commissioner should weigh in on initiatives for the next twelve months. Commissioner Jenkins mentioned previously discussed tasks such as making sure that Medicaid codes are open so that children have access to hearing services when needed. Commissioner Jenkins indicated that she sees the role of the Commission is to support initiatives already being undertaken in the state of Georgia by individuals.

Next Steps for the Commission

The Commission should work on pursuing texting access to 911. The Commission should set aside time to meet in person to discuss next steps. A moderator would be useful in helping to facilitate ideas.

It was mentioned that DPH, the Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) all have accessibility

funds, and all those state agencies are required to follow ADA legislation. It was further mentioned that they are required to make public messaging accessible to citizens who have different accessibility needs. It was further stated that accessible information needs to be available on the state websites, but it is not the job of the Commission to create those vlogs. It was proposed that state agencies should be contacted to allow the opportunity to create their messaging in an accessible format. It was also proposed that the Commission could consider creating a best practices document that can be provided to the state agencies. The agencies would then be provided a reasonable amount of time to do the work before the Commission makes an official recommendation to the Governor's Office. It was further proposed that the Commission should look at state agency website links to make sure they are in line with best practices.

It was also mentioned that the National Association for the Deaf (NAD), ranked the states in terms of how well they did in providing ASL at press conferences. Georgia ranked in the mid-30s. Commissioner Jenkins contacted the Governor's Office to alert them of the report in the event they wanted to provide additional information to NAD. Commissioner Jenkins reported that the Governor's Office provided a lot of links to youtube videos to NAD that showed their efforts to accommodate deaf individuals.

Upcoming Meeting in Atlanta

The Commission discussed scheduling a meeting to be held in Atlanta pending everyone's schedule to discuss action items going forward.

The meeting was adjourned.