

**Georgia Commission for the Deaf or Hard of Hearing**  
**Thursday, July 16, 2020**  
**1:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**  
**Virtual - Zoom**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present: Mrs. Jennifer Clark, Mrs. Kelly Jenkins, Mr. Jim Lynch, Dr. Amy Lederberg, Mr. Jimmy Peterson, Mrs. Ellen Rolader, Mrs. Dana Tarter, Chair - Mr. Comer Yates, and Director - Dr. Stacey Tucci**

**Members Absent: Dr. Chip Goldsmith, Dr. Jiovanne Hughart, Dr. Beth Lytle, Ms. Deshonda Washington**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Comer Yates.

Comer Yates opened the meeting by asking all participants of the meeting wanting to get a sense where everyone is in terms of education and COVID-19.

Discussion took place with the issue of going back to school despite the COVID-19 pandemic and getting a sense of how people felt about school starting back up in the fall. While the idea of opening school for children with disabilities seemed favorable (i.e., a small amount of children going back would warrant more control over potential spread). But since there are still questions regarding health risks and limited resources to get children with disabilities back to school, it does present some issues. A major metro area school system recently shared that schools will start out fully virtual. There is some worry for kids who do not have internet access or those with low-bandwidth internet. It was a challenge to get kids online last spring. It is really about getting the parents on board about information regarding going back to school. There are concerns and challenges especially for the younger students. The virtual experience was easier for some parents. For others, it was more difficult especially for those who have to work. It was also mentioned that parents are polarized when going back to school, and the concern is that it may trickle down to the kids.

Chairperson Yates then shifted the discussion to the adults within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. What can the commission do for the adults?

Currently, there is a lot of discussion regarding face masks for the DHH community. The possible use of clear masks needs to be emphasized especially for those who use speechreading. Commissioner Peterson attended a meeting/conference involving MARTA. Bus drivers are all wearing cloth masks which makes it difficult to communicate with many members in the DHH community. It was asked if drivers could use clear masks or face shields instead of cloth masks. It was mentioned if this issue can be brought up to the governor and to push funding so that essential workers can have clear masks to accommodate the DHH community.

Dr. Tucci brought up the CARES Act – the Georgia Dept of Education (GaDOE) applied for funds for the purchase of face masks for schools. GEMA has received funds for cloth masks to

be distributed in conjunction with GaDOE. It is not believed that clear masks were included in the original purchase order. Need to follow up with GEMA and GaDOE to confirm. There may be funding available to purchase clear masks /face shields if GEMA/GaDOE has not done this. However, many companies that sell clear masks are out of stock due to high demand. There are issues with face shields regarding sneezing...some professionals are getting push back whether it is effective or not since droplets fall to the desk or floor. Chair Yates suggested that there are face shields with cloth covering under mask to keep droplets from spreading. If face masks are needed: how many would we need to be purchased for adults and what type would be most effective? Commissioner Peterson shared that National Association of State Agencies of the DHH (NASA DHH) demonstrated the different types of face masks to which one was a cloth mask with a clear window. It would probably not be possible to provide for all within the DHH Community, but it might be possible to provide for essential workers of state departments/agencies/etc. including state interpreters.

Beside the CARES Act funding – may need to find another agency to supply the funds and purchase and be able to distribute masks. Dr. Tucci mentioned that there are 3 versions of masks that could be used to accommodate the DHH Communities visual access needs:

1. Cloth with clear window
2. Fully clear plastic (however, there is the issue of fogging)
3. Full face shields

While Face shields are an option, some school districts do not consider the full face shield due to the lack of containing the droplets, i.e sneezing. In addition, these masks are on back order. Dr. Tucci will contact GEMA and GaDOE to see if clear masks are available to schools districts and/or state depts/agencies. There are questions around distribution. Further feedback is needed.

A question about how COVID-19 has affected rural school populations as well as the State Schools. The GaDOE State Schools are Georgia School for the Deaf (GSD) and Atlanta Area School for the Deaf (AASD). These schools serve DHH children statewide including many from rural areas. These schools will most likely delay school start dates and will most likely provide a virtual option and possibly go fully virtual.

The discussion shifted back to DHH adults: any special focus for the DHH adult Community during COVID?

It was suggested if a press release or some sort of public announcement could be made highlighting the frustration within the DHH Community regarding communication with those wearing face masks/coverings/etc. It is important to get the message out about clear masks. There are American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for press conferences to help facilitate clear communication, could the clear masks message be delivered in conjunction with this great COVID-19 messaging? Other states are making it happen re: providing clear masks. Maybe Georgia can look to these states for guidance/advice. One solution is to work with GEMA to get the message out. The question is: what does messaging look like for clear masks especially for those businesses that are requiring masks for their employees. It would be beneficial if these businesses could ensure at least 1 designated employee to wear a clear mask to accommodate for the deaf and hard of hearing.

All Hands On ([allhandson.org](http://allhandson.org)) is a company that provides information related to emergency management through ASL. They are working closely with GEMA and the Governor's Office to serve the deaf community during COVID-19. They have local mask distribution efforts in progress. It was suggested to reach out to All Hands On to partner for a virtual Townhall for the DHH Community to share their concerns and challenges during COVID-19. Chair Yates, Commissioner Rolader, and Dr. Tucci will reach out to All Hands On and to see how the Commission can partner with their organization.

Another COVID related issue: challenges visiting the doctor or audiologist. There are several doctors who have reached out to Commissioner Peterson about providing interpreters. Some interpreters are turning down appointments due to COVID-19 concerns and this presents challenges to doctors and patients.

While going to the audiologist may be necessary, it may be delayed to a later time due to COVID-19. The concern is more for the children who are needing these services more so than adults given that children are still developing language and listening skills. Audiologists offices are mostly open and seeing client, but it is a matter of whether parents feel comfortable taking their kids at this time.

Chair Yates asked about places of worship; is there any messaging that needs to be sent to the religious community? Commissioner Rolader mentioned that her church tried to provide captioning for services, but it did not work well. May need to investigate this for other places of worship. Captioning though not preferable, is better than no language services. The preference is a live interpreter.

Other issues that may need to be addressed regarding the adult DHH Community are:

Food insecurity

Domestic violence

While these are being addressed within education/child population, are these issues being addressed for the adult DHH Community?

What other action steps can we take beside working with GEMA and All Hands On?

It was brought of about involving stakeholders and task force members for COVID-19 needs for the DHH Community. There were concerns about adding another meeting to stakeholders' and task force members' schedules. Dr. Tucci will follow up. Commissioner Clark asked if Commissioners could participate within the stakeholder meetings as a silent participant. Dr. Tucci said yes, and she will share upcoming meeting information. It was mentioned that there was discussion regarding the reconvening of all groups working under OCGA 30-1-5 before COVID-19. Maybe it would be appropriate to revisit this and see if we can make this happen as a possible town hall type meeting. Dr. Tucci will contact the OCGA 30-1-5 Task Force, commissioners, and stakeholders to see if a virtual DHH meeting is possible. Commissioners all agree this is a good action item.

Dr. Tucci shared the GaDOE's L4GA literacy grant was awarded to the Division of State

Schools for \$1.5 million over the next 5 years. It was the only State School Division in the nation to be awarded this federal grant. The L4GA team lead by Dr. Tucci will work in partnership with the Commission when appropriate.

Dr Tucci mentioned the Year 2 OCGA 30-1-5 Annual Report to the Governor and the General Assembly. September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 is the deadline for submission of this report. Should there be a request to delay the report so that it can be more encompassing or should the report be submitted with what we have so far? An additional concern about this year's (Year 2) and next year's (Year 3) OCGA 30-1-5 Annual Report regarding literacy was discussed. Georgia students did not receive the GA Milestones English Language Arts Assessment last year due to virtual learning/COVID. Chair Yates responded by indicating that a preliminary OCGA 30-1-5 report be submitted by the deadline. State the facts of the situation and the lack of data in the preliminary report. A subsequent report with full data analysis will be submitted after the preliminary report. All Commissioners agree.

Commissioner Peterson mentioned that the GSD uses tutors from the DHH Community. Will this tutoring be able to continue if GSD is virtual? Dr. Tucci will follow up.

Commissioner Clark mentioned a captioning service called Streamer Solutions that could be used as a possible tool for virtual instruction. Dr. Tucci suggested that some sort of a "cheat sheet" be created to provide resources to facilitate language use at home and also for the classroom. Foundations for Literacy – early literacy curriculum for children who are DHH App to support virtual learning will be out in September for teachers of the DHH in Georgia. Dr. Tucci will share this virtual tool when it is ready.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:45pm**