



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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ZOOM Full Council Quarterly Meeting

Full Council Meeting Minutes October 19, 2022

Council Members: Present (P) Not Present (NP)

Jeanette Alexander (P)	Julia Barol (P)	Paul Fogle (P)
Lynn Heitz (P)	Michele Leahy (P)	Michelle Paonessa (P)
Andrew Pennington (P)	Kara Donatucci Pham (P)	Laura Princiotta (P)
Susan Tomasic (NP)	William Del Toro Vargas (NP)	Rob Wallington (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Present: Ryan Hyde, Lee Ann Stewart, Cheryl Novak, James Whitonis, Marci Katona, Mark Maurer, Danielle Schmidgall, Jessica Crum-Lasko, Marci Katona, Mark Maurer, Douglas Rand, Kim Robinson, Krista Sloan, Susan Storm, Mara Wolfe

Stakeholders Present: Melissa Hawkins (Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing), Joseph Drenth (State Board of Vocational Rehabilitation), James Martini (PA Workforce Development Board)

Guest Speaker: Joan Kester, EdD., CRC (Assistant Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies, Program Director, Interdisciplinary Secondary Transition Services Program, The George Washington University Principal Investigator, The Transition Discoveries Initiative), Erin Weierbach (Youth Empowerment Coordinator at Parent Education & Advocacy, Leadership (PEAL) Center)

Project Staff Present: Michelle Gerrick, Christopher Todd

Moderator of Zoom Present: Nichole Wade

CART: Brooke

Interpreters: Ashley Shenk, Jessica Bentley Sassaman

Guests: Sylenthia Dent, Christine Hunsinger, Michelle Mitchell, Joan Myers Goodman, Lizette Tripur, Angel Torres

CONVENE THE MEETING: Mr. Paul Fogle, Chair

- After welcoming remarks, Mr. Fogle read the PaRC mission statement

DISCUSSION OF AGENDA ADDITIONS/

- There were no additions to the agenda.

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington to approve today's agenda and past meeting minutes. Ms. Jeanette Alexander seconded the motion. All were in favor.

PaRC Fiscal Report – First quarter (July, August, September 2022)

Ms. Jeanette Alexander, Member at Large

- Ms. Alexander reported that expenses for the first quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-2023 totaled \$1961.73. July's expenses were \$190.64, August's expenses were \$1,459.64, and September's expenses were \$311.45. Costs remain low due to the impacts that COVID-19 continues to have on travel. Travel is the Council's largest expense.

OVR DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Ryan Hyde, OVR Acting Executive Director

- Mr. Hyde reported that OVR has continued to reinforce three main priorities which are staffing, customer engagement, and referrals and outcomes.
- Staffing: OVR has recently transitioned to a new HR system, postings for open positions have increased, changes to Minimum Education and Training (MET) requirements were implemented in July which now allow Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) positions to be eligible through Master's Degrees in special education, human services, social work, and many other related studies. Since June, 46 new staff were hired, 51 VRC's are in various stages of hiring process, approximately 150 positions need to be filled state-wide. New hirings included training specialist, contracts and grants specialist, program analyst 3, and Chief Financial Officer.
- Customer Engagement: In the Spring all District Offices (DOs) were asked to establish local work groups and create outreach plans which were implemented throughout the Summer. DOs are being asked to revisit and reform workgroups to focus on engagement with schools, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), and

local CareerLink systems to continue outreach efforts and remake connections lost due to the pandemic.

- Referrals and Outcomes: There have been significant increases in referrals since March 2022 compared to 12 months prior. Rapid Engagement initiative has continued to be successful and was implemented to ensure customers can move quickly through the application and eligibility process. On August 8, 2022 the Order of Selection (OOS) was opened for all three categories, Most Significantly Disable (MSD), Significantly Disabled (SD), and Non Significantly Disabled (NSD). At this time, approximately 60 customers remain within the SD and NSD categories about half of what it was in August 2022. CareerLink accessibility reviews have continued with approximately 10 locations left that need to be completed. PA Transition Conference took place in August 2022 with a focus on collaboration between local teams and agencies which included the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) and the Bureau of Special Education (BSE). OVR Bureau Directors provided overviews on various programs and engaged well with the audience. HGAC also provided several informational sessions on their initiatives during the conference. Summer Academies are being planned for 2023 and will support 25 students for each program. The My Works partnership is looking to expand with additional municipalities, townships, counties, and cities. The program provides work-based learning experiences with students with disabilities over the Summer and was located in 31 different counties with more than 40 programs this past year. The Summer Internship Program for college students with disabilities was very successful and will be expanded in 2023 as well. PA Outdoor Corps is similar to the My Works Program and hires workers to beautify and improve parks all across the Commonwealth, providing an opportunity to learn work related skills, operate power tools, and light construction.
- Finances: 2022 Federal Fiscal Year (FY) Award has been matched and approximately \$100 million will be carried over to the next FY 2023. A full award from the Federal Government is also expected with a total of \$144.6 million for the entire VR program. \$21.7 million of that amount will be reserved for preemployment transition services (Pre-ETS). In September 2022 a total of \$9.2 million was spent on VR and Pre-ETS services. Physical plant updates and improvements continue at HGAC including a roof replacement. Overall, there has been an upward trajectory of spending and services provided compared to the past two years.
- Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE) grant was awarded to Pennsylvania for the full amount just under \$14 million and will go toward assisting individuals who wish to exit sub minimum wage employment for competitive integrated employment. The focus for this initiative will be on Green

Manufacturing and distribution centers with the intent to create embedded programs. Mr. Hyde inquired if members may have connections to share regarding manufacturing and distribution centers that may be used for the grant.

- Mr. Rob Wallington stated that this is an exciting opportunity and would reach out to his leadership to inquire about providing potential contacts and resources for OVR.
- Monthly service trainings have continued with all OVR staff virtually and include topics such as rapid engagement and system updates. The Client Assistance Program (CAP) provided a presentation on their services during a recent training. PA Workforce Development also provided a presentation on Skill Up, a new online learning management system. Another training is scheduled for November and will be held bi-monthly in 2023.
- The CWDS update was launched, the RSA 911 report was submitted on time for the past quarter, the OOS will remain open, Board changes to the college policy and FNT will also remain open. Leadership will be attending the CSAVR conference to report on PA OVR initiatives to spend federal funds and engage with customers, share information on MET changes, and report on changes made to FNT, college policy, and the OOS.
- National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) theme is Disability, part of the equity equation. In recognition of NDEAM HGAC will be holding an event with nearly one thousand visitors expected that will be providing tours and information about their programs.
- Mr. Hyde would like to thank Secretary Barrier for her support and acknowledge all of the work that staff has completed over the last several months. Everyone is very much committed toward working to better serve OVR's customers and rebuild connections lost since the pandemic as things are definitely trending in the right direction and will hopefully return to pre pandemic levels in 2023 and 2024.
- Ms. Michele Leahy inquired about funding and services OVR provides for benefits counseling, Social Security counseling and if more robust benefits counseling is being planned based upon the additional funding now available. Inquired if private entities are used for benefits counseling. Commented that as Social Media Committee Chair would like to receive employment success stories and official press releases on all of the great work that OVR is doing so the Council may inform the public and its followers on social media.
- Mr. Hyde informed attendees that the additional funding can be used for benefits counseling and has requested staff to provide materials and plan a presentation on recent changes made to benefits counseling services for the next Full Council meeting. OVR does have fee-for-service agreements with private entities and is willing to work with any provider that has the required certifications. More details about that will be provided on a presentation for benefits counseling. Reported

that some press releases are provided including for the SWTCIE grant. Recently leadership had planned to reinstitute some mandatory success story collections in the next few weeks, more information will be available when appropriate.

- Mr. Andrew Pennington inquired if there is no longer a preapplication and if there is now a process for a single page referral through CWDS. Applauded OVR for streamlining the process as the past preapplication was often confused with applying for services rather than a referral.
- Mr. Hyde informed attendees that upon the 2019 RSA monitoring they were advised to change the referral process. This new workflow was implemented in October to resolve the monitoring finding.

OVR UPDATE: QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT STATE PLAN / WIOA COMMON PERFORMANCE MEASURES / COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CSNA) / THE REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION'S CASE SERVICE REPORT (RSA-911)

Ms. Lee Ann Stewart, Division Chief of Policy, Staff Development & Training

Mr. Jim Whitonis, VR Specialist

Mr. Mark Maurer, Program Analyst 3

- Mr. Whitonis reported that the two-year modification of the State Plan was approved by RSA and became effective on July 1, 2022.
- Goal 1, increase competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities: The apprenticeship expertise and apprenticeship navigator programs have been expanded by five specialists that are actively engaging with businesses in various sectors to increase partnerships, training, consultation, and inclusiveness. The OVR State Employment Internship program has been restarted and expanded in collaboration with the PA Office of Administration. Five interns have been offered positions with sponsoring agencies. OVR's partnership with PA Workforce Development on accessibility reviews for CareerLink locations is nearly complete with 7 comprehensive sites left to complete. Many sites have been equipped with assistive technology, Fusion, JAWS, Zoom Text, new computers, and power adjusted tables.
- Goal 3, increase community education and outreach: OVR leadership has recognized the need to improve return rate for Customer Satisfaction Surveys and identified surveys were going to customer's SPAM e-mail. A remedy for this issue is being implemented and research is also being done to identify success other states have had and adopting those strategies to improve survey results. Currently awaiting results of the 2019-2022 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to identify linguistic differences and the needs of unserved or underserved individuals with disabilities from cultural and ethnic minorities.

- Part 3 of the goal is meeting accessibility and technology needs based upon universal design principles. The Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) mission is to assist Pennsylvanians who are blind or visually impaired gain the skills necessary to live and work independently in their communities. They strive to ensure that all internal staff and stakeholders are able to fully access OVR services, communications, and information. They provide assistive technology, training, and devices to both customers and staff in accessible forms including braille. All electronic forms are fully accessible.
- CSNA: Temple University has been provided a statement of work developed in conjunction with the Council. The next CSNA cycle is anticipated to begin January 1, 2023. OVR is meeting with Temple on November 9, 2022, to review a draft of the final CSNA report for the 2019-2022 cycle.
- Mr. Maurer shared the following link from the RSA website where their ETA-9169 data is published: <https://rsa.ed.gov/wioa-resources/wioa-annual-reports>
- Reported that the recent data shows improvement in cases closed but lags behind in comparison to national averages. Credential Attainment Rate does not show results or provide credit for customers who have earned a diploma, certification, or post-secondary degrees / are still enrolled and have not exited services. OVR is exploring methods to better capture data for a pre-exit measurement.
- Ms. Michelle Paonessa inquired if there is data included related to deaf and hard of hearing communities.
- Mr. Maurer reported that RSA does not break down data to specific disabilities, but it does include deaf and hard of hearing as well as blind and visually impaired as well as all variety of disabilities that customers might come to OVR to deal with and to find competitive integrated employment.

OVR UPDATE: VEHICLE MODIFICATION POLICY UPDATE

Ms. Cheryl Novak

- Ms. Novak reported the Vehicle Modification policy has combined 8 separate documents into 1 comprehensive document. Information that has been added includes nonadaptive driving services, pre-driving services, updated internal forms and processes. The workgroup includes members of the Council, Board, and CAP and is in the final stages of preparing a draft for public comment and meetings to be held from mid-December to mid-January. Final draft approval is anticipated for February and March.

OVR UPDATE: AUDIOLOGICAL SERVICES POLICY

Mr. Russ Goddard, VR Specialist

- Mr. Goddard reported that the Audiological Services workgroup is currently analyzing the potential impacts of the recent FDA approved over-the-counter hearing aids may have on services for OVR customers. The workgroup also held discussion on different models of how the hearing aids could be purchased. A final draft of the policy is anticipated to be available for review by mid-2023.

OVR UPDATE: BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP)

Ms. Jessica Crum-Lasko, Acting Director of Business Enterprise Program

- Ms. Crum-Lasko reported that several staff have been hired and provided training recently. There has been a lot of change since the pandemic with a lot more staff teleworking and much lower populations within federal and state buildings. The Business Enterprise Program is looking at creative solutions to maintain viable business options for licensees.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Lizette Tripur stated that she is a parent of a student in High School with a 504 plan and inquired if there is documentation regarding employment outcome statistics on counselor efforts, direct placements versus purchase placements, and information on customer engagement, attendance of transition meetings, and partnering with schools.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde stated that direct placement versus purchase placement is not currently being tracked. However, OVR does provide a lot of supported and customized employment services. Reporting on attendance of IEP, 504, transition activities is included in the Act 26 reports and staff can provide that information which is open to the public.
- Ms. Sylenthia Dent stated that she is a parent from Beaver County with a son in transitional stage and inquired about a grant that will be geared toward green and/ or industry jobs.
- Mr. Ryan Hyde explained that particular grant required OVR to propose areas of employment to focus on. In Pennsylvania green manufacturing and distribution centers were chosen because there is a broader need to support those industries. OVR has the ability to provide services to anyone who would be eligible to pursue a vocational goal in the different industries of their choice.

PRESENTATION: TRANSITION DISCOVERIES

Joan Kester, EdD., CRC Assistant Professor of Special Education and Disability Studies Program Director, Interdisciplinary Secondary Transition Services Program, George Washington University

Principal Investigator, The Transition Discoveries Initiative
Erin Weierbach, Youth Empowerment Coordinator at Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center

- Dr. Joan Kester and Ms. Erin Weierbach provided their backgrounds in Transition Services and explained how their work connects schools to communities and partners with youth and families to build networks supports. They have developed a Transition Discoveries website that features a full curriculum on transition they have developed and also provides a lot of resources. The website can be found at the following link: <https://www.transitiondiscoveries.org/>
- The Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council provided a grant for this project and is all about systems change to improve transitions. Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network, and Temple University have also been co-collaborators. Data from over 500 people was collected and analyzed for development of a framework which has nine indicators that youth and family felt were the most important factors toward successful transition.
- Three sites were highlighted from the start of the project including Pittsburgh Public Schools, Warrior Run School District, and Berks County Transition Coordinating Council. Transition Discoveries now has 31 communities participating.
- This is not an education only model. Participants could include local communities, parent groups, and OVR. PATTAN also partners and provides funding into schools and pathway grants for competitive integrated employment.
- The project continues to grow with another 20 partnerships planned for the fall and is a combination of research, resource development to improve practices and the implementation model.
- Ms. Michelle Paonessa inquired if the resources are specifically related to sign language or in different formats for deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind people. Inquired if the YouTube videos are accessible.
- Ms. Weierbach and Dr. Kester explained that the videos are manually captioned and available in other languages. The resources are available in the resources tab of the website and include 54 lesson plans and tip sheets that are all in English and Spanish. The website is fully accessible.
- Ms. Lynn Heitz inquired if the PDFs are accessible and if the videos include audio descriptions.
- Ms. Weierbach and Dr. Kester explained that the PDFs are accessible thanked the member for their suggestions regarding audio descriptions.
- Ms. Julia Barol inquired if any schools in the Philadelphia area are participating.
- Dr. Kester informed attendees that Transition Discoveries has not received applications from the Philadelphia area. New sites have been funded by PATTAN

and have put out applications to submit proposals. Sites can implement without receiving funding.

OLD BUSINESS

PaRC Committee reports and other informational reports

- Mr. Wallington, Chair of the CareerLink/WIOA Committee, provided an update on concerns regarding Unemployment Compensation application process, payments, delays, and accessibility issues at local CareerLink sites, that he has been informed of through members of his community.
- Ms. Leahy, Chair of the Social Media/Outreach Committee, provided an update on the PaRC Newsletter, efforts to increase database of contacts / newsletter sign up invitation, and additional marketing / outreach efforts.
- Mr. Fogle provided an update regarding efforts by the Governance Committee to update and revise PaRC Member Handbook, policies and procedures.

NEW BUSINESS

PaRC 2021-2022 Annual Report – Ms. Jeanette Alexander

- Ms. Alexander reviewed a draft of the 2021-2022 PaRC Annual Report that was shared on the screen by the moderator. An Annual Report is mandated by the Rehab Act to be submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and Governor's Office by December 31st of each year. The report covers the FY beginning July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022. Have been in contact with PATTAN to request student success stories to include in the Annual Report. Asked for members to provide input, feedback, contacts for OVR Success Stories. A limited number of printed copies will be made available once the report is submitted to RSA and the Governor's Office

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ms. Sylenthia Dent inquired about information on how to apply to the Council.
- Mr. Fogle informed attendees that the become a member webpage on the PaRC website has more information and an application, contact information, and current vacancies.
- Ms. Michelle Gerrick agreed to provide more information regarding the application as follow up after the meeting.
- Ms. Lizette Tripur stated that more transition youth would like to participate and that more participants may be available to attend meetings if they were held after school hours.

- Dr. Kester stated that they are working with the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network on opportunities for youth to meet regularly, will share resources and follow up after the meeting, and may also have opportunities for youth to share their stories

ADJOURN

MOTION was made by Mr. Rob Wallington to adjourn. Ms. Lynn Heitz seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.