



Pennsylvania Rehabilitation Council (PaRC)

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Transition and Education Committee Meeting Minutes November 28, 2023 2:30 PM to 3:30 PM

Members Present (P)

Not Present (NP)

Julia Grant Barol (P)
Lorie Brew (P)

Andrew Pennington (P)
Jessica Keogh (NP)

Michelle Mitchell (NP)
Paul Fogle (P)

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Staff Present: Cheryl Novak, James Whitonis, Chris Harbert, Anna Griffiths

Guests Present: Alyse Watson, Bureau of Special Education (BSE), Kathy Walton, Riverview Intermediate Unit #6

PaRC Staff Present: Chris Todd

CALL TO ORDER

This meeting was conducted through Zoom. Ms. Julia Barol called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM after quorum was established.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND PAST MINUTES

MOTION was made by Ms. Lorie Brew for approval of the agenda and past meeting minutes. Mr. Andrew Pennington seconded the motion. All were in favor.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS

Updates from Bureau of Special Education (BSE)

- Ms. Alyse Watson, Eastern Division Chief for the Bureau of Special Education explained that the PA Department of Education (PDE) is scheduled for the end of February and is in the planning stages. The HELIX Conference was held November

15 – 17, 2023 which emphasized regular education joining their special education counterparts in learning about Low Incidence Curriculum. BSE is currently working with districts on the policy change that allows students to stay in the education system until their 22nd birthday. BSE along with OVR, PATTAN, LEAs and Intermediate Units, ODP, and RSA were awarded the \$9.9 million 5-year PA Transition Pathways to Partnership Demonstration Model or DIF grant. Work has begun on the grant and the grant year 1 runs from October 2023 to September 2024. BSE intends to fill former member Ms. Jeanette Alexander’s position on the Council as PDE Representative as soon as possible. That position has been posted with the Bureau and throughout PDE.

OVR Updates

Youth Ambassador Program

Transition Navigator

Early Reach Workgroup

- Mr. Chris Harbert reported that Riverview Intermediate Unit #6 began working with their second Youth Ambassador at the start of the year. Their educational and vocational goals are related to criminal justice. Activities included touring local 911 center, juvenile justice centers, and Abraxas Center, involved in presenting on budgeting skills, visiting the Clarion County Court, and an IU sponsored YMCA event. OVR anticipates many more Youth Ambassadors to be hired in the coming months. A provider in Allentown is partnering with Clarion IU #20 to sponsor their Youth Ambassador who has begun the onboarding and orientation process. 2 providers in Washington are looking to hire 4 Youth Ambassadors each. OVR plans to have the program continue to grow statewide.
- Mr. Pennington explained that the program has struggled to find providers, but the plan is to grow statewide. Providers that are targeted for this program are very specific and include LEAs, IUs, and advocacy agencies. A provider agreement is required between the entity hosting the Youth Ambassador and OVR. The provider agreement and other information is located on the OVR website at the following link <https://www.dli.pa.gov/Individuals/Disability-Services/Pages/Publications.aspx>
- Ms. Barol explained that the Committee will follow up on this program and its related documentation at the next meeting. It would be phenomenal to have a Youth Ambassador in the Philadelphia area.
- Mr. Harbert will follow up with Ms. Kim Robinson for more information regarding Transition Navigator program, Early Reach Workgroup, and other OVR Transition updates.

Transition Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- Ms. Barol explained that members have not received survey data since the last meeting and inquired if there were any recent changes in the process of sending/receiving surveys so that data may be collected and reviewed.
- Ms. Novak explained that Mr. Ralph Roach oversees the surveys and has been in contact with other states that have had success in improving their survey return

rates. Mr. Roach has attended past meetings to report on the surveys and can be invited to future meetings to provide updates. Staff will also reach out to Ms. Robinson to address other topics that were on today's agenda to follow up prior to the next quarterly Committee meeting.

- Mr. Pennington inquired when the surveys are sent out. Inquired if counselors or other OVR staff provide any prompting or notification that the surveys are being sent. If someone is not prompted prior to receiving the satisfaction surveys, they are much less likely to respond or complete the surveys.
- Ms. Novak explained that surveys are sent out and received on a monthly basis. BBVS and BVRS 26 successful closure surveys go to customers one month, 6 months, and 12 months post closure. Unsuccessful closures are only sent to the customer once within the first month after closure. Transition surveys are not sent post closure. Notification of the surveys may have been added to customer letters from the counselor. Mr. Roach can provide further clarification and details.
- Ms. Barol explained that other states include a link to a survey within each email to customers from their counselor. This was not necessarily provided at the end of services, but customers were provided an opportunity to respond at any point during services which resulted in a very high rate of return.
- Members agreed to include further discussion of the surveys when Mr. Roach is present during a Committee meeting. Mr. Harbert agreed to ask Mr. Roach to follow up on members questions on the timeline of sending surveys following the providing of services and if there is anything new that he is working on in regard to the surveys. Members explained it would be helpful to be provided an update on the surveys for the December 11th Executive Committee meeting and then have further discussion when Mr. Roach is available to attend a Committee meeting.

Work Experience for High School Students with Disabilities Act (Act 26) Report

- Ms. Barol inquired what is the current status with the understaffing of the Philadelphia District Office.
- Ms. Novak reported that there has been a huge effort with both the Philadelphia and Norristown District Offices to recruit staffing which have included recent in-person recruiting events. Increases in hiring is expected. Ms. Danielle Frascella, OVR Human Resources, may be available to attend a Council meeting to provide more data and information related to hiring. Additional hiring events are planned and the issue of lack of staffing is statewide. OVR is working very hard to fill vacancies.
- Mr. Pennington reported that during a recent CAC meeting he was informed that there are currently 6 openings for counselors in Philadelphia. There are a lot of new staff in that District Office including 4 new counselors and 2 counselors for customers who are deaf or hard of hearing. Rapid engagement events are being held regularly.
- Ms. Brew conveyed that the PEAL Center has been outreached from educators in Philadelphia because of the lack of services from OVR. PEAL Center is helping with that, making sure that secondary transition services for students in Philadelphia are recognized, and know about the work experiences that are available to them.

Conference Information

**Pennsylvania Department of Education / Bureau of Special Education Annual Conference, February 28 - March 1, 2024, Hershey Lodge & Convention Center
2024 PA Community of Practice Transition Conference, July 31-August 1, 2024**

- Ms. Barol volunteered to represent the Council at the PDE/BSE Conference in February. Ms. Brew will be attending the conference as well through her role with the PEAL Center.

Adjourn

MOTION was made by Ms. Brew to adjourn. Mr. Pennington seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.