

Howard County Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
September 12, 2019

Attendees:

Missie Baxter, Beth Benevides, Patrick Boxall, Ernestine Bridges, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Stephanie Discepolo, Kathy Land, Erica Lewis, Seth Masley, Suzanne Mesol, Dianne Nagle, Cindy Parr, Laura Parsons, Susan Potts, Dawson Robertson, Ann Scholz, Kaya Swann, Brian Welsh

Guests: Naysha Conway (Humanim), Natalie Dohner (Project SEARCH), Doris Jacobs (Humanim), Tanisha Robertson (DORS), Sanket Patel (Project SEARCH),

Absent:

Michelle Henry, Colette Jackson, Kathy McSweeney, Judi Olinger, Kelly Ruby, Jemira Sarratt, Meghan Smallwood

Meeting called to order at 8:40am

Welcome and Introductions

Ernestine (Ernie) Bridges, Deputy Administrator in the Howard County Office of Human Resources, was welcomed to the Commission.

Approval of Minutes

Cindy Parr made a motion to approve the May 9, 2019, meeting minutes. Katie Collins-Ihrke seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Project SEARCH Update

N. Dohner announced that County Executive Ball extended the Project SEARCH MOU between the Arc of Howard County and the Howard County Government through 2022. Now in its sixth year, Project SEARCH (PS) has 11 interns for the school year in nine county departments. A new orientation for interns was added to the program. WJZ-TV attended the orientation:

<https://baltimore.cbslocal.com/video/4162613-project-search-helps-students-with-developmental-disabilities-gain-government-internship-experience/>

Kathy van de Castle, a longtime educator with HCPSS, is the new PS special educator. Sanket Patel introduced himself as a proud PS intern from Mt. Hebron High School.

PS success and post-exit employment will be highlighted in a new marketing video. The goal is to show the business community that transitioning students are interested in, and ready for, employment. The video will premier in October during national Disability Employment Awareness Month. There will be a reception for businesses hosted by the Arc to debut the video.

N. Dohner has also connected with the Society of Human Resources Managers (SHRM). Her involvement here will add important information about the hiring needs of people with disabilities to the SHRM discussion. It will also provide insight to the disability community on the needs/concerns of human resources managers/businesses.

There will be an information session for prospective PS interns (2020-21) on October 22 at the Old Cedar Lane Building.

Employment-Related Discussion

P. Boxall shared that the staff of the Howard County Autism Society is actively and intentionally trying to engage businesses. HCAS hopes to identify a small group of employers with a demand for employees and then facilitate their connection to individuals with disabilities looking for employment. HCAS is also looking into supporting low or no-cost training to select businesses.

P. Boxall referenced the *Disability Employment and Inclusion Guide to Success* published by the Workplace Initiative. This excellent guide explores the process of creating and executing an effective disability employment and inclusion program. It includes suggestions for businesses to build a culture of inclusion, provides sample screening tools and performance reviews, and provides templates and sample agreements to help businesses with the disability employment and inclusion process. (PDF is attached to the meeting minutes.)

B. Benevides added that Ananta Hejeebu and Del. Jessica Feldmark recently spoke with Jade Gingrinch, Maryland Department of Disabilities, about Employment First initiatives in Howard County. Ananta continues to promote the “match.com” type of site to connect businesses and job-seekers with disabilities. MDOD has engaged key partners to provide feedback on this idea and to discuss potential strategies and resources that may be necessary to facilitate such development.

It was agreed that this input from the Office of Workforce Development (OWD) would be helpful to the Commission. There has not been regular participation by OWD.

HCPSS Update: High Schools and Transitioning Students with Disabilities

S. Discepolo provided an update on the HCPSS apprenticeship program. There are 19 students currently participating in four programs—electrical, direct service professionals, HVAC, and IT. A particular challenge for students wishing to participate is the interview process. The group discussed the need for better preparation of students in CRD or tutorial classes, as well as the need for employers to provide accommodations afforded by ADA.

M. Baxter shared that 91.5% of HCPSS students with disabilities are enrolled in training programs or college, or are employed one year after exiting the school system. This is the highest percentage among all school systems in the state.

Two students with disabilities successfully completed summer internships in the Department of Special Education.

All students who are exiting the school system in June 2020 will exit with a complete digital portfolio. Students in Project SEARCH and Community Connections, as well as one student from each high school, will use the MSDE/JHU CTE online tool. All other students will use a template created by the transition team.

Community Connections at HCC has added another certification program; in addition to child care certification, students can complete the office skills certification. There are three teachers, three paras, and 27 students in the Community Connections program. All students are working in the afternoons.

A new curriculum is being embedded in tutorial classes for diploma-bound students. Self-advocacy, interviewing skills, and social communication will be taught 15-20 minutes per day.

Students with 504s and IEPs who are diploma bound will have the opportunity to visit and tour HCC on October 24. Project Access, Disability Support Services, and representatives from academic support offices will present. S. Potts recommended a student panel. K. Collins-Ihrke shared that Anne Arundel Community College has an active self-advocacy group called Students Out to Destroy Assumptions (SODA). She offered to connect Dianne Nagle with SODA, as such a group does not currently exist at HCC.

D. Robertson shared that all transition teachers will receive training by Humanim on how to support students in the workplace. The teachers will shadow Humanim job coaches at the end of September.

Office of Children and Families Update

K. Swann shared that the Department of Community Resources and Services (DCSR) recently sent out a press release advertising the vacant Commission positions (student and community member). Applications are being accepted for these positions. The Commission is also in need of appointed business members. K. Swann offered to prepare and send out a press release announcing these vacancies as well.

DCRS recruited 14 student volunteers for a two-week internship in July. The group included a student with a disability. Given the success of the program, the Student4Service volunteer program will be offered again next summer. Recruitment will take place in May.

A new position has been created in DCRS to support citizens with disabilities—Manager, Office of Disability Services. Applications are being accepted.

<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/howardcounty/jobs/2554637/human-services-specialist-iii-manager-office-of-disabilities-services-commun>

Workgroup Reports

The **Community** workgroup met with Best Buddies Maryland. Tom Waite, director of programs, has been invited to present at the November Commission meeting. He will share information about the Citizen Buddy program for adults and Best Buddies Jobs.

The **Education** workgroup is planning speakers for the Parent-to-Parent Transition Group. The group will meet the last Thursday of the month, September through May, at the Howard County Autism Society/NonProfit Center in Patuxent Woods. Missie Baxter will be the guest speaker on September 26.

It was suggested that Whitney Gray from DORS be invited to present on the DORS Pathways Program at Howard Community College, which provides additional supports to college students on the autism spectrum by assisting with self-advocacy, communication and organization skills, and helping them to identify campus resources. Pathways staff also provides education and support to college personnel regarding working with students with autism.

A discussion around information sharing with students with 504s took place – it was suggested that the Education Workgroup consider this as part of their work for the year, to determine improvements that may be necessary via the Office of Student Services (school counselors/psychologists).

The Parent Empowerment Workshop being offered on October 12 will focus on thoroughly explaining the IEP document itself, section by section. This workshop was put together in response to parent feedback and requests for additional IEP support.

The Transition Symposium will take place on November 9 at Wilde Lake Middle School. The keynote speaker is Dr. Josie Badger. There will also be two panels—employers will share their perspectives on successfully including people with disabilities; and business owners with disabilities (young self-employed self-advocates) will share their stories of creating their own businesses.

The **Employment** workgroup did not meet during the summer.

Member Updates

S. Myers will be leaving the Howard County DORS office and moving to the central office/data analysis department. A new program manager has not yet been named.

D. Nagle reported that Project Access students were fully integrated at HCC, with HCC email accounts, and access to all campus resources and Canvas. Classes took place in two separate classrooms to teach students the skills necessary for transitioning between classes, managing time, location, etc. SAT and ACT prep classes were added, as well as a class on project-based learning. 84 students participated in Project Access this summer; 68% of the students were from Howard County.

D. Jacobs shared that the WE STEP program will be held at the Y and Veterans Elementary; eight Homewood students will work at these child care sites twice each week.

N. Conway shared that the Student Career Choices program has expanded from one site (Oakland Mills High School) to two (adding Howard High School). Up to eight students may participate at each site. Humanim supported 22 students in the Start on Success (SOS) program this summer.

E. Lewis said the Commission on Disabilities met with the County Executive to discuss recommendations included in the “Report on the Status of People with Disabilities in Howard County.” Next steps were not identified at the meeting. The Commission on Disabilities annual employment awards ceremony will take place on October 3 (6:30pm doors open; 7pm ceremony) at the Roger Carter Center.

S. Potts shared that Raul Delerme is the new director of Rec & Parks. Sensory Sundays are now offered once a month at the Robinson Nature Center (social stories, sensory bags, and 30-minute visit agendas are available).

K. Land and Service Coordination will be presenting to parents at Cedar Lane School, as well as to transition specialists on the DDA eligibility process. Service Coordination is expanding to add a fourth supervisor in its Howard County office.

Closing

The meeting adjourned at 10:31am.

2019-20 Meetings:

November 14, 2019 – 8:30-10:30am (Roger Carter Community Center)

January 9, 2020 – 8:30-10:30am (Roger Carter Community Center)

March 12, 2020 – 8:30-10:30am (Roger Carter Community Center)

May 14, 2020 – 8:30-10:30am (Roger Carter Community Center)