

Howard County Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities
Meeting Minutes
January 14, 2021

Attendees:

Stephanie Adibe, Beth Benevides, Alexandra Berry, Patrick Boxall, Kimesha Brown, Naysha Conway-Hart, Lea Fant, Stephanie Hayes, Michelle Henry, Colette Jackson, Kathy Land, Erica Lewis, Dianne Nagle, Judi Olinger, Cindy Parr, Mercedes Peterman, Susan Potts, Dawson Robertson, Jemira Sarratt, Ann Scholz, Meghan Smallwood, Dana Stewart

Guests: Natalie Dohner (Project SEARCH), Doris Jacobs (Humanim)

Absent:

Missie Baxter, Ernestine Bridges, Katie Collins-Ihrke, Stephanie Discepolo, Kelly Ruby, Janice Yetter

Meeting called to order at 8:32 a.m.

Welcome and Introductions

B. Benevides welcomed Commission members and shared the agenda. Mercedes Peterman joins the commission as supervisor of the Columbia office of DORS. Stephanie Hayes joins the commission as a transition resource teacher and Kimesha Brown joins the commission as the new transition teacher at the Homewood School.

Approval of Minutes

Judi Olinger made a motion to approve the November 12, 2020, minutes. A. Scholz seconded the motion. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Membership

B. Benevides and S. Adibe updated members on the status of membership. N. Conway-Hart has received notice of her appointment through 2024. A. Berry (individual) and K. Land (community member, Service Coordination) await confirmation, as well as a parent member who was recommended in January 2020. Currently two vacancies remain in the business community. In July 2021, three parent member positions will need to be filled. B. Benevides, P. Boxall, and C. Jackson will exit the Commission as their terms will expire. The Commission bylaws require a parent co-chair.

S. Adibe is working with the County Executive's office to create position openings via a press release. The press release will be shared with Commission members next week; it will also be shared by the County Executive's office, social media, and Constant Contact.

B. Benevides requested that transition teachers help identify parents in 9th and 10th grades who may be candidates for the parent member positions. In the meantime, anyone interested in joining the Commission may attend the meetings under the Open Meetings

Act. Letters of interest and resumes may be sent to the County Executive's office at any time.

Office on Disabilities

M. Henry shared that the Commission on Disabilities and DCRS celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. A video featuring disability rights activist Judith Heumann and announcing the winners of the Howard County ADA30 Art Contest has been produced: <https://www.howardcountymd.gov/adaartcontest>

M. Henry shared that the countywide Digital Equity Group and DCRS/ADA Office are making great strides to address the gap in internet access for people with disabilities. They are currently working to obtain tablets that include wifi and broadband access. There will be a limited supply. Once all administrative details and eligibility criteria are decided, M. Henry will share directions on how to apply. In the meantime, if anyone knows of individuals who would benefit from this offering, please email mhenry@howardcountymd.gov.

HCPSS Update: High Schools and Transitioning Students with Disabilities

D. Robertson provided updates. High school students with disabilities ages 18-21 year old will likely be the first group to return to in-person services, including students in Project SEARCH. There is not a definite timeline.

Transition workshops continue to be offered to parents virtually. Attendance remains high. The transition fair is still planned for the spring. Not yet determined whether the fair will be offered over several nights, several weeks, in-person, or virtually.

A. Scholz shared that HCPSS is starting a monthly series for Spanish-speaking families in collaboration with the Howard County Autism Society and Parents Place of Maryland. Playgroups for young children are attracting three times the number of families.

Stephanie Hayes welcomed to the Department of Special Education; under a grant, her position has been added to support transition efforts, specifically expansion of work opportunities for students with disabilities in the Career and Community Exploration (CCE) program. S. Hayes added that current priorities are to provide students with opportunities to explore work, and to meet and work with other students and staff members while in the virtual learning environment. There are plans to provide CCE students with opportunities similar to Community Connections.

N. Dohner updated members on Project SEARCH. Applications for the 2021-22 cohort are due by March 5. Interviews and skills assessments will be done virtually. Interns have been working at home (with instruction via Zoom) on clerical tasks for outside businesses and HCPSS. They recently completed a 3,000-piece mailer for HCC Project Access. If anyone has work that needs to be done, please let Natalie Dohner know. Guest speakers are also needed for Friday mornings—county employees or community members willing to discuss their careers.

M. Smallwood noted two upcoming presentations: January 19—parent forum targeted to students earning a certificate; panel of parents will share experiences with adult agencies. February 2—healthcare transition workshop with Heather Luke (PPMD).

Service Coordination / DDA

K. Land shared that DDA is working on requesting an extension of Appendix K, which is an amendment to DDA waivers that allows for changes in services due to COVID-19. There have been delays in processing waiver applications for transitioning youth. For students transitioning this year (exiting school in June), submission of person-centered plans and budgets is on hold per DDA. This hold should be released by the end of January, but not yet confirmed.

Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS)

M. Peterman shared that all staff of the Columbia DORS office remain working remotely full-time. The agency has implemented new virtual services (career assessment) and approved others (work readiness) to be offered virtually. A new pre-ETS service is available called Explore Work, which consists of modules that cover all five pre-ETS services. Providers offer 1:1 facilitation to navigate each module. Transition teachers have been informed of this new service. Some vocational rehabilitation (VR) services are being provided in-person (job development and job coaching). The workforce and technology center began minimal in-person services for training programs and career assessment programs. Contact Mercedes Peterman for a list of programs.

Project Access / HCC

D. Nagle shared that Project Access will be offered in the summer, though it is not yet known whether HCC will be open for in-person services. Campus is closed through May. Families are recommended to apply now. A virtual open-house will be held February 6 (Saturday) 10:00-11:30am.

Office of Workforce Development

J. Sarratt noted that OWD is providing virtual services to youth in programs. Limited work experiences are offered in-person.

Howard County Recreation and Parks

S. Potts shared that all programs will remain on virtual platforms through the summer. Return to services will be slow as the department will need to rebuild staff. COVID-19 policies, procedures, and best practices for camp providers are being written. Virtual programs currently offered are going well and are well-attended. Socialization and engagement are the goals of all programs. Rec & Parks is partnering with the Howard County Autism Society to provide some programs to its members.

Next Chapter Book Club (HCRP is now an affiliate member) is a book club for people with disabilities. Selected readings are at the 4th-6th grade levels. Focused on topics of independent living, relationships, friendships, problem solving.

The Playground for All at Blandair Park is very close to completion. Communication boards (with Braille) have been included in the playground.

Providers

The Arc of Howard County is hosting a virtual COVID-19 Town Hall on Thursday, February 4, 5:00-6:30pm.

D. Jacobs (Humanim) shared that Humanim consumers largely reported satisfaction with virtual services. Transitioning youth participating in afterschool programs struggle to maintain stamina and engagement after a full day of school, but staff is dedicated to making programs and workshops as engaging and interactive as possible. Humanim will continue to offer many programs virtually, even when other programs return to in-person.

K. Collins-Ihrke (ARI) shared that ARI is mailing out safety supplies to Howard County residents with disabilities for free. Cloth masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and toilet paper rolls are available. Requests may be made via the [questionnaire](#) on the ARI website or by contacting Audrey Sellers at asellers@arinow.org or 443-713-3915. ARI also has Chromebooks available for those in need who wish to further their independence. Chromebooks come with a year-long contract for IT support as well. Contact Betsy Hein at bhein@arinow.org.

Member Updates

Commission member discussed accessibility to the COVID-19 vaccine for individuals with disabilities. It is understood that individuals with disabilities will be included in vaccine priority group 1B and employees supporting individuals with disabilities will be in group 1C. M. Henry is participating in the disability roundtable at the county health department to ensure equitable access for people with disabilities.

A. Berry shared that she received her diploma and is now participating in services at Athelas. Though not able to volunteer or interact in-person with others at this time, she is attending virtual meetings at Athelas and still pursuing a future volunteer opportunity at the YMCA.

Closing

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Upcoming 2020-2021 Meetings:

March 11, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (WebEx)

May 13, 2021 – 8:30-10:30am (WebEx)