

State of Nevada Autism Task Force
Education Subcommittee
MINUTES

Thursday, April 17, 2008
Teleconference

Members Present: Diane Branson, Dr. Cathy Scott, Korri Ward, Jan Crandy, Carol Lamkins, Jennifer Van Tress, and Nicole Kalkowski

Members Absent: Randy Figurski, Assemblywoman Francis Allen, and Assemblyman James Ohrenschall.

Guests: Suzanne Lawrence

Staff: Melanie Stevens

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Ms. Ward opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m., by welcoming those present and asking all to introduce themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Dr. Cathy Scott pointed out that the word 'aides' was misspelled in the minutes. The correction was made. Ms. Crandy motioned to approve the minutes from the March 19, 2008 meeting of the Education subcommittee meeting as amended. The motion was seconded by Dr. Scott and the motioned carried unanimously.

CLARIFICATION BY CHAIR OF OPEN MEETING LAWS:

Ms. Ward stressed to the subcommittee that e-mail communications cannot be used to deliberate subcommittee business. She said the subcommittee can distribute information to the other members for review via e-mail but all discussion and deliberation will occur at the next scheduled meeting.

RE-DESIGNATION OF SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS:

As chairperson of this subcommittee, Ms. Ward re-appointed people on the list of subcommittee members to either voting members or interested parties, depending on their availability to participate in the subcommittee business. *Voting members now include: Korri Ward, Carol Lamkins, Dr. Cathy Scott, Jan Crandy, Diane Branson, Jennifer Van Tress, Randy Figurski, Nicole Kalkowski, Assemblyman Ohrenschall, and Assemblywoman Francis Allen.*

DISCUSSION OF EDUCATION ISSUES:

The committee discussed the amount of paperwork special education teachers, including autism specific staff are currently responsible for, for each child with autism. Teachers are overwhelmed with it. The committee suggested it look into ways to ease their load to

increase teacher retention across the state. They also looked at the possibility of increasing the number of aides the teachers are entitled to with the stipulation the aides be well trained as to not make the children too reliant on adult help.

DISCUSSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS:

The committee looked at the barriers teachers in Nevada face in being certified to teach students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), and how to retain those teachers once they are certified. . The committee outlined three barriers to certification: (1) The expense of the classes for teachers, especially new teachers, results in teachers not finishing. (2) The classes are not offered every semester, which has led to some teachers not finishing within the three year timeline. (3) The classes are not available online. Furthermore, concern was expressed that some course work should be hands on. The committee recommended the State of Nevada make online course work be offered year around for teachers to get and/or update their Autism Certification. They also suggested the State of Nevada set aside funding to help the teachers pay for these classes. The committee looked at reducing the caseloads for teachers with students with autism, including resource room teachers, self contained classroom teachers, speech pathologists, and occupational therapists. Dr. Scott clarified for the group, that the state helps pay special education teachers' salaries, but districts are responsible for the classroom aides' salaries. **Ms. Van Tress and Dr. Scott will look into what is available for special education now, and compare it to what we need. They will separate rural vs. urban school district areas to keep the count more accurate.** The committee looked at the current Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) requirements for class size/caseloads. *Dr. Scott motioned to recommend adjusting the NAC to reduce the caseload for resource room teachers (to 12 students plus 4 more with an aide), and self contained teachers and autism specific teachers (4 students plus an additional 2 with an aide).* *Ms. Crandy seconded the motion.* The committee discussed recognizing teacher consulting time of 3 hours per week to consult outside of their caseload, but ultimately decided that the reduction in caseload would better reduce the paperwork. **Dr. Scott will coordinate with Ms. Lawrence and Ms. Van Tress to write up the findings to this recommendation of reducing caseloads and what the teacher training requirements should include. They will send out their findings to the subcommittee.**

DISCUSSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS:

Ms. Crandy will send out Minnesota's specialized competencies to the group to use as a base for discussion at the next meeting. *She motioned for the subcommittee to recommend requiring 1). Specialized competencies and the training to meet those competencies for all paraprofessionals working with children with autism, 2). A rate of pay increase for paraprofessionals once those competencies have been met, and 3). Funding for the training to get specialized competencies.* *Ms. Branson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.* **Ms. Crandy and Ms. Kalkowski will write up this recommendation and share their findings with the subcommittee next meeting.**

DISCUSSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS:

*Dr. Scott motioned for the State of Nevada to set aside state funds for non-profit organizations to access through grants to provide training for parents of children with autism. Ms. Crandy seconded the motion and it passed without dissent. They also added the possibility of school districts and State agencies supporting it by helping to get the word out about the availability of these funds. The committee discussed the possibility of a State team to provide wrap around training (parents, schools, and teachers) in rural areas. **Ms. Ward will write up the recommendations for parents of children with autism and distribute to the subcommittee for their next meeting.***

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was none.

CONFIRM THE NEXT MEETING DATE:

The committee agreed to meet again on Wednesday, May 7th at 10:00 am

ADJOURNMENT:

With no other business to discuss, Ms. Crandy motioned for adjournment. Dr. Scott seconded and the meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.