

State of Nevada Autism Task Force
Workforce Development Subcommittee
MINUTES

Friday, April 18th, 2008
Teleconference

Members Present: Dr. Matt Tincani, Mary Liveratti, and Jan Marson.

Members Absent: Dr. Nancy Sylvania, Michael Harley, Angie deBraga, Assemblyman James Ohrenschall, Angela Flora, Shannon Ward and Jacque Matteoni.

Guests: Teri Vaughan

Staff: Melanie Stevens

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

Dr. Matt Tincani opened the meeting at 1:45 p.m. by welcoming those present. It was established there was no quorum present.

ELECTION OF SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR:

No vote could be taken without a quorum present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The subcommittee delayed approving the minutes from the February 12, 2008 Workforce Development subcommittee meeting until a quorum can be reached.

DISCUSSION OF SUBCOMMITTEE'S FINAL REPORT:

Dr. Tincani circulated a revised draft of the subcommittee's final report to be submitted to the Autism Task Force (see below). Those present agreed the draft was well done and nearly complete. Ms. Liveratti suggested the State of Nevada support or enhance its current Alternative Route to Licensure (ARL) program so that it can be expanded to help more people get their certification to teach individuals with Autism. Ms. Marson suggested item #10 be expanded to include a self-assessment tool or survey, to poll those working with individuals with Autism across a wide array of service delivery systems to see where their professionals are at, what their needs are, and how they want to further the experience with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The committee also discussed the possibility of developing a mentorship program for teachers teaching students with Autism.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

There was none.

SET NEXT MEETING DATE:

The committee agreed to meet again on Monday, May 19th 2008 at 1:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no other business to discuss the meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Nevada Autism Taskforce Workforce Subcommittee
Final Report
DRAFT April 16, 2008
Matt Tincani, Ph.D., Chair

What is the Autism Workforce in Nevada?

People with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) require intensive supports across the lifespan. These include, but are not limited to, early intervention, special education, applied behavior analysis, speech / language therapy, and services to promote successful transitions to adulthood. A well-trained workforce of direct and peripheral service providers is needed to address the intensive needs of people with ASD in Nevada.

- **Direct Service Providers'** primary job responsibilities involve supporting people with ASD and related disabilities.
- **Peripheral Service Providers'** primary job responsibilities do not involve supporting people with ASD and related disabilities; however, they interact with individuals on the spectrum during the course of their professional duties.

Direct Service Providers

Early Intervention Specialists
Occupational Therapists
Speech/Language Therapists
Physical Therapists
Adaptive Physical Education Teachers
Special Education Teachers
Discrete Trial Therapists
Applied Behavior Analysts
Case Managers
Job Coaches
Specialized Physicians (e.g., neurologists, psychiatrists)

Peripheral Service Providers

Law Enforcement Personnel
Emergency Responders
Non-Specialized Physicians (e.g., general practitioners)
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What is Nevada's Current Workforce Capacity with Respect to Autism?

A fiscally stable higher education system is necessary to support Nevada's ASD workforce. The intensive support needs of individuals with ASD, in combination with Nevada's rapidly growing population, underscore the state's inadequate resources to sustain an effective workforce. Nevada's inadequate workforce resources are evidenced by the following:

- In 2007, the Nevada Legislature funded the state's colleges and universities at just 84.5 percent of the national average¹.
- Nevada's university system sustained a 4.5 percent budget cut in 2008². Additional budget cuts are expected as tax revenues continue to fall below projected levels.
- At UNLV, the state's largest research university, the impacts of budget cuts include delays in hiring new faculty and student advisors, suspension or elimination of new programs, larger class sizes, and delays in updating classroom technology³. Similar negative impacts are expected at Nevada's other colleges and universities.
- Budget cuts at Nevada's universities and colleges hinder the hiring and retention of faculty who train ASD direct service providers.

As Nevada's population continues to grow and increasing numbers of children are diagnosed with ASD, it is clear that the state's current higher education resources are inadequate to meet personnel preparation needs.

What are the Current Workforce Deficits and Needs in Nevada?

The lack of capacity to sustain an effective ASD workforce is reflected in chronic shortages across all direct service provider professions. The following statistics illustrate the state's chronic workforce shortages:

- Students with ASD served in Nevada's school programs jumped from 1,779 in 2005 to 2,559 in 2008, an increase of 69%⁴.
- 43 Nevada school programs for students with ASD were staffed by substitute teachers who lacked credentials and training to teach students with ASD in 2008⁴.
- 60 additional school programs were staffed by teachers who were fulfilling the requirements of the Nevada autism endorsement, but who were yet not qualified to teach students with ASD⁴.

- The Clark County School District had 34 unfilled speech language pathologist / speech language therapist positions in 2007⁵.
- Only 25 Board Certified Behavior Analysts resided in Nevada in 2008⁶.

Chronic workforce shortages result in poor and inadequate services for people with ASD. Primary professionals cannot learn how to effectively support individuals on the spectrum through informal or “on the fly” job training. Rather, ASD is a complex disorder that demands personnel with specialized training.

The consequences of declining support for higher education programs are severe. For example, untrained substitute teachers cannot provide effective behavior support to children with ASD, resulting in higher rates of problem behaviors, expensive and restrictive school placements, and unnecessary stress for families. Lack of qualified professionals in Nevada also means that parents and service providers must pay for expert assistance from professionals in other states, such as California, further eroding Nevada’s tax base and placing unreasonable financial burdens on families and service providers to pay for out-of-state services.

Finally, addressing Nevada’s workforce shortage across the critical areas is not just a matter of “spending smarter” with existing state resources. Both current and future programs require stable financial support for training of professionals to serve Nevada’s burgeoning population of people with ASD.

Action Steps to Sustain an Effective Autism Workforce

Much can be done to improve Nevada’s autism workforce. The following concrete steps will enhance Nevada’s autism workforce capacity:

- Increase Funding for ASD Programs in Critical Shortage Areas. Direct service provider professions with critical shortages include special education, speech/language therapy, applied behavior analysis, and vocational services. The Nevada Legislature must create line item budgetary funding for critical shortage area programs at UNLV, UNR, and Nevada’s other colleges. Funding would support the hiring of faculty to train direct services providers, tuition for students, and infrastructure to support programs.
- Maintain Funding for Nevada’s System of Higher Education at Parity with the National Average. Budget cuts to the Nevada System of Higher Education compromise existing and future programs to train direct services providers. As one of the fastest growing states in the nation, it is critical for Nevada’s System of Higher Education to keep pace with increasing demand for ASD support professionals. Maintaining a reasonable level of funding for Nevada’s System of Higher Education will help to ensure that programs continue and grow.

- Secure Federal Funding to Support Professional Training Programs. Federal assistance is available to defray the costs of ASD professional training programs. The Nevada System of Higher Education could secure federal funding to match state revenues expended on ASD programs. Potential sources of federal monies include competitive grants and contracts from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Nevada System of Higher Education colleges and universities should collaborate for procurement of funds to support collaborative programs across units.
- Develop a 10-Year Strategic Plan to Address Nevada's ASD Workforce Needs. Nevada's population will change dramatically in the next ten years. Ongoing planning is necessary to understand the changing demands for ASD professionals. The Nevada Autism Taskforce should develop a 10-Year Strategic Plan to address the state's needs for both primary and peripheral ASD service providers. The strategic plan should include ongoing and formal assessments of professional preparation needs.

Sources

- a. As Reported February 1, 2007 in the Las Vegas Review Journal, *HIGHER EDUCATION: Health Sciences Center at forefront of higher education issues*, by Lawrence Mower.
- b. As Reported March 29, 2008 in the Las Vegas Review Journal, *Sales plunge, worsening budget woes*, by Sean Whaley.
- c. *Summary Points on UNLV 2007-2009 Biennial Operating Budget – Governor’s Reductions*, UNLV Institutional Planning, January 18, 2008.
- d. *Commission on Professional Standards Statewide Autism Data*, Nevada Department of Education, February 2008.
- e. *Nevada School Based Speech Pathologists/ Speech Therapists: Statewide statistics: 2006/2007*.
- f. *Behavior Analyst Certification Board Certification Registry*, April 15, 2008.