

January 22, 2008

In attendance: Jim Wrye (Chair), Nancy Barnes, Jennifer Muller, Beverly Marson, Tuwanna McGee, Julie Brown, Heather French, Melody Crane.

The Subcommittee on Education and Training worked on the following initial recommendations to present to the Full Task Force, Wednesday, January 23, 2008.

- Establish Regional Autism Centers in Alabama institutions of higher learning.
- To establish the position of State Autism Director in the Alabama Department of Education.
 - As new regional training and support system establishes itself, state director to set up training for current year.
- Assessment of current training needs, and review of current training practices.
- Fund for training and teacher support.

To establish regional autism centers

A number of regional autism centers in the state's institutions of higher learning should be established. Establishment of these regional centers and state funding should be awarded by an RFP process with parameters set by a multidisciplinary committee.

These regional autism centers will provide resource and training services for persons of all ages and of all levels of intellectual functioning who have autism spectrum disorders as defined by the state code of Alabama.

Each center should provide:

- A multidisciplinary staff that has expertise in all aspects of ASD.
- Professional training programs that include developing, providing, and evaluating preservice and inservice training in state-of-the-art practices for personnel who work with the populations served by the centers and their families, especially school districts.
- Technical assistance and consultation services, including specific assistance for a client, the client's family, and the school district, and any other services that are appropriate. A center's assistance should not supplant other responsibilities of state and local agencies, and each school district is responsible for providing an appropriate education program for clients of a center who are school age.
- Public education programs to increase awareness of the public about autism, autistic-related disabilities of communication and behavior, dual sensory impairments, and sensory impairments with other handicapping conditions.

Each center shall be operationally and fiscally independent and shall provide services within its geographical region of the state. Service delivery shall be consistent for all centers. Each center shall coordinate services within and between state and local agencies and school districts but may not duplicate services provided by those agencies or school districts.

Each center should have a constituency board, which shall work collaboratively with the center. Each board shall consist of members whom are either diagnosed with ASD, or is a member of a family that includes a person who has such a diagnosis. Boards shall advise on policies, and evaluate the activities and accomplishments of its center during the year.

The State Board of Education, in cooperation with the regional autism centers, shall adopt the necessary rules to carry out coordination with public school systems.

To promote statewide planning and coordination, a conference must be held annually for staff from all regional centers and representatives from each center's constituency board.

Explanation: Florida established these regional autism centers by statute in 2002, and the program has since grown from seven to 11 centers. The centers are based at Florida's major public universities, and access the best research and practices. Being university based, the centers also provide a means to affect disciplines as varied as medicine and education in their approach to autism.

Establishing regional centers with responsibility for a geographic area makes sense for the problems of resource and personnel distribution. Having one-stop regional centers for school systems, parents with questions, referral networks, and public awareness, based in stable public institutions.

Moreover, the committee recognized that many of Alabama's public universities are already inherently heading in this direction.

Establish the position of State Autism Director in the Alabama Department of Education.

The position will be the point person for all aspects of education policy for ASD, including communicating any changes in IDEA and ESEA. It will keep regional centers informed on laws, and help coordinate between centers.

As new regional training and support system establishes itself, state director will need to coordinate training.

The committee recommends changes to the model proposed by the ALSDE:.

- Regional training that focuses directly on teachers;
- A variety training modules for different skill sets and practices. Some of those practices include:
 - Understanding Autism
 - Foundations of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Behavior Modification

- Understanding Behavior
- Teaching Strategies based on the Principles of ABA (DTT, PRT, floortime, verbal behavior)
- Social Skills and Relationship Development Intervention
- Direct support for teachers, paraprofessionals, and school systems to access training.

Creating new training models

The committee recommends a full assessment of current training needs, and review of current training practices. The review must look at long-term workforce development and the needs of immediate technical assistance.

A fund must be established to support training of paraprofessional and teachers.

The committee recommends an establishment of a fund to pay for substitutes, travel, and other expenses incurred by the school system for training.