

**Maine SRC-DBVI
Meeting Minutes
April 16, 2014
1:00 - 4:00
Frances Perkins Conference Room
Commerce Center, Augusta**

Present: John McMahon, DBVI Director; Scott Murray, SRC-DBVI Admin. Assistant; Jim Phipps, Iris Network Director; Cheryl Peabody, ACB Maine; Michelle Mason, VA Healthcare System/Blinded Veterans Advocacy; Nancy Moulton, Education Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Children; Kathy Despres, C.A.R.E.S., Brad Strause, AlphaOne/SILC; Sue Fairfield, Maine Parent Federation; Cindy Bernstein, DOE; Chris Boynton, Maine State Library; Lynn Merrill, PTGDU

On Polycom: Mark Sinclair, NEBAA; Walter Voitasek, Deaf-Blind Rep;

Absent with Notice: Jenn Fry, Aetna; Carrie Brooker, DBVI-VR; Kelly Osborn, Wabanaki VR;

I. Call to Order: Meeting called to order at 1:07 by Brad Strause.

II. Public Comment: None.

III. Approval of Minutes. Jim Phipps moved to approve February minutes, Walter Voitasek seconded. No discussion. All in favor, with one abstention (Kathy was absent from February meeting.)

IV. Agenda Items:

1. *Official address and post box for SRC:* John suggested and Walter made motion to use DBVI mailing address and have mail forwarded to Scott. Lynn seconded. Vote taken, all in favor. Motion carried unanimously. Address confirmed as: 150 State House Station 04333-0150. Scott will send a forwarding address to John.

2. *Smarter Balanced Trials:* (Before Nancy started, John cautioned about excluding non-public information from discussion.) Nancy then gave overview of Smarter Balanced (SB)-- assessment designed to look at "common core" (Maine's "revised Maine learning results.") Test is adaptive, it tailors subsequent questions based answers to previous ones. All states have proficiency measures; some states are using PARCC assessment instead. Maine's statewide assessments are the NECAP for grades 3-8 and SAT for grade 10. NECAP has tended to be

administered in the fall testing previous year's learning. SB is done in spring (March - June) and tests current grade; all students will be assessed, some will get alternate assessment, but based on disabilities other than visual impairment.

SB field tested in VT last year, concerns arose so were also expected this year. We looked to ensure Maine students with visual impairments involved, but only heard about Braille learners - test can't be taken in hardcopy, so Braille version not available, too many items (25K) and low demand cited, too. One district exempted student for lack of equipment; other student unsuccessfully attempted math part. Nancy sharing concerns with DOE re: is instrument accessible? Around 20 states using SB but some start it and then withdraw. Oregon used it as requirement for graduation but typical student had three tries, whereas Braille readers had one; civil rights complaint resulted. Many states have accessibility issues with blind students and this test, learning is ongoing. Jim cited other challenges, platform-specific behavior of screen readers --no such thing as universal design. Nancy mentioned that SB certifies equipment, like JAWS, portable Braille displays, but internet connection during testing was an issue and additional equipment cost per student is \$10-12K.

Cindy mentioned some Maine schools are not prepared to use adaptive portion and can opt out, in which case none of the students participate. SB is contracted with APH so there's progress with specific issues. IEP-team should be making the decisions with TVI involved. No assistance needed from SRC at this point.

3. Public Hearing in June: Preparations discussed, including John's suggestion to inform regions where higher outreach expected, via NFB, ACB, PTGDU. Hard to get people to read an 80-page document and comment on it, especially when people prefer to comment on service they are receiving. Could offer call-in option from home, as opposed to respondents having to go to Career Center. Jim suggested posting link on DBVI web site, (SRC, too, though site is still under construction.) Could use public comment as a way to educate consumers about how state plan is tailored to them, document doesn't make connection obvious--not user-friendly. Would be great to be able to make available via live streaming, but cost-prohibitive (looked at MaineAirs but was tens of thousands of dollars). Could collaborate with other organizations to share costs of streaming.

State Plan draft in progress, this is a good time to add things if needed. Although submission is June 30th, we would still have three months to finalize (still preferable to add things before then.)

4. NCSRC Conference: Brad led discussion: first two days were for SRC members, then three days of council administrators. Lot of good information, talked a lot about attachments to the state plan, one of which is for recommendations by the SRC, strategies discussed for preparing--we need to

develop the habit of identifying recommendations and have Scott mark those in the minutes or collect a list for DBVI. Kathy mentioned re: CSNA work, Kelly has new position at GWNNE, (hoping to stay on the councils but she gave notice for 121 Grant), new position will include developing relationships with VR systems in other states. Some plans for CSNA are on hold, may need to be revised. Also need to figure out if Kelly can continue with DBVI-SRC, she is also on SILC and DVR's SRC. Need to check in with her, but if she leaves 121 she is no longer on the SRC. She will have to get approval from GW to continue with SRC.

John mentioned a brief conversation with Brad about length of the conference; may need to split it up, especially since latter segment is for blindness VRs-- doesn't always have to be the Chair that goes. Also Brad terms out in Oct, terms need to be longer, Kathy agreed should be 2-year term. John mentioned that conference happens in both spring and fall, could go to both and just attend blindness piece in fall. Discussion of budget ensued, need to increase, but probably less than 50%.

Discussion then turned to having DBVI staff on each committee as liaison and facilitator. Jim in favor. John clarified DBVI staff person's role: to facilitate committee, liaison to DBVI for info, learn about SRC. This is a recruiting opportunity we're not taking advantage of. Brad mentioned that many states have a disconnect. Jim cited analogy to corporate world, suggested that John identify staff to be involved. Scott will email committee list to Brad - was updated at fall conference, no revision since then.

John then clarified stance on DOE/DOL. Public VR position is that public rehab should stay in DOE. DOL federally thinks it should go to Labor. We were strongly cautioned not to espouse an opposing position. Jim added that issue is not just staying or going, but whether or not the rehab programs administered under the Rehab Act should be split into three different agencies. John then stated CSAVR's view of top three problems: 1. move to DOL, 2. downgrading rehab counselor positions to employment-specialist-level, 3. sub-minimum wage.

Brad then mentioned a sudden strong effort in the Legislature on VR move to DOL. Proposal was written quickly and submitted and passed at 5:15 on a Friday with greatly shortened comment period and workup. No input sought from RSA, no public hearings, no data, no research. Current status is unknown. VR misconceived as employment/placement program, but it's a rehabilitation program that culminates in employment, as Rehab Act states. Jim added that if education and rehabilitation systems do their jobs, the clients can get their own job, and the rehabilitation part of VR needs to be stressed. Federal delegation is home now so this is a good time for a conversation.

5. Update on Facilities Grant (John): Iris Network info has been rolled into answers for 25 questions from commissioner's office. John is meeting with Brenda on Friday, then will send document back to Jim, then to commissioner's office. Document is 29 pages and will be available for review by the end of next week. Governor needs to understand we're not asking the State of Maine for money--it's all federal. But the state is the gatekeeper, a perspective new with this administration; we need to satisfy the administration that it makes sense to spend this money. John added that the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind had a training center committee conversation about connecting the skills of blindness and adjustment to blindness to career education, job training, and employment, as part of an immersion center. Had long talk with person from Florida, which has new Deputy Director of State Services--sessions at their center are a year long and not many who attend actually end up employed, though they don't track that -- very interested in talking to ME.

John is also expecting another shorter round of questions, need to come before 8/15. They are looking for how we will schedule trainings, but the need for customization makes that hard to answer-- we may get asked for that again. Jim mentioned that the grant is only for infrastructure, program funding will be totally separate, and at least two years away, so it is hard to predict. John mentioned Maine Sunday telegram article about a visually impaired person who went to Carroll Center--would be nice to have served him in ME -- Jim will send link to that. Could be posted on the website, too.

6. BEP Update: Appropriations didn't resolve issues and introduce legislation related to recommendations, but there were no cuts, either. Governor has 10 days to respond. Also, cuts proposed in 2014 supplemental budget were taken out. Also 3.2 million at start of year drops to 2.98 by end of year, could run out of general fund money by the end of next year. We are doing what needs to be done to avoid reductions. Kathy asked about IL money, which is funded three ways: Direct through Title VII, then through DSU, then IL for blind elders. Kathy thought that money to SILC from DSU came out of DVR, which John says is likely.

V. New Business: None

VI. Representative Update:

1. Director's Report. Two O+M instructor positions vacant, 3rd O+M Instructor on medical leave, two interns starting this summer, one in Portland, one is from W. Michigan University. Also met O+M Instructor in New York who will be here in Ellsworth this summer.

Brad mentioned discussion about staffing at conference last week, recruitment/retention a problem for most states, Maine is in position similar to South: our pay scale needs improvement - ***possible recommendation for State Plan:*** "Do a market adjustment to provide adequate pay for VR counselors to recruit and maintain good ones" Jim added that this goes across the board for all the professional staff: teachers VRTs, TVIs, O+M instructors.

Utah had a unique approach; they created another category of paraprofessionals (to handle multiple clerical tasks) because a survey of counselors showed they were only spending 14 hours a week face-to-face interacting with clients, data which is not tracked here in DBVI. John also cited a severe shortage nationwide of qualified professionals at every level and position: Connecticut pays very well but has current openings for VR, VRT and O+M. The VA pays well, but is hunting for people, so pay scale isn't the only issue. Other problem is competing professions: PT pays double compared to O+M. Brad also cited perception, Utah refers to a caseload as a "practice." John cited DBVI's upgrading of admin staff to RC 1's so that when counselor gets involved, intake/releases are already done.

UMF is looking to us for a internship and has a bachelor's program in rehabilitation. Esther Carr in the Portland office did internship in Augusta and is now getting master's in O+M.

Lot of talk nation-wide in blindness agencies about trying to get SSP services included in ADA. Funding differs from state to state (Maine has none, program has hit plateau--needs more outreach to both SSPs and consumers). Recent event at Iris included Corinna Veasart presentation, tactile interpreting practice for ASL students. Starting conversations about events in a different part of the state for outreach to this almost-universally-underserved population.

College prep: Nine students applied, met with NH and Vermont, they want students involved so we sent agenda to them. Director thought this was the best program he's seen so he's now talking with counselors. Talking about going back to a national model. Will have 2-day workshop about teen-employment provided by AFB, may also invite SRC members, non-college-prep students welcome to come, probably happen toward the end of July.

Community Service Project: Some students still get exempted from community service requirement, but we want to work that into learning labs and get juniors involved. Details TBA.

Current data from past six months: Closures are 16 ahead of last year (goal is 50 for 2014) and fully staffed with VR counselors for past four months. One client is back making \$90,000/year despite 5-years hiatus - came through employability skills program. Two DBVI staff earned Master's degree during last 6 months:

Bruce Archer in Aroostook and Annette Tilsley in Augusta. Annette is also going to Mississippi State University. (Carrie went last year). If grant is renewed we will get new folks involved, this is fully funded by RSA. Out of state travel is an issue, though, despite no cost to Maine.

CSNA: Spoke to Mississippi State U, starting Florida's assessment, which takes 9-12 months and initially they were not interested in us. But face-to-face they're open and will write us a proposal. Good deal if they can work with us to do assessments. Lot of stuff we can do if they set up the structure. Waiting for proposal--John will share it with group.

Needs assessment has to be done for the plan we'll be writing a year from now. Won't be done in time for the state plan that goes in September 2014. RFP for CAP due, now writing RFP, revising from 5 years ago, will go out shortly. Waiting for Department of Purchases, between now and June that RFP will be out and we'll be working to offer/award the contract. Last year the review was done internally, will be expanded this year, with SRC representation. Kelly offered to do it for General SRC, Brad will represent DBVI-SRC.

Maine is small so you have to look at level of conflict of interest with bidders. Everyone in BRS has conflict of interest because we know who the bidders are. Conflict inherent--we have to offset it. Will add a 6th person from Bureau of Purchases, will move quickly.

2. Treasurer's Report: (Lynn) Support staff line item paid out \$302.37, balance is \$506.61. Can move monies from another line item if needed. Expense of \$805 for Brad's travel, \$2400 left, minus about \$1500 not yet reported. More expense against 2013 annual training--invoice from Alex hall for \$300, leaving \$450 left for annual training line item.

3. 121 Grant: No report.

4. Client Assistance Program: No cases; once they got staffed, people stopped calling. Update on 5 Councils: Empowerment Forum is up and running, planned for August 6th, materials out by 6/1. Question came up about accessibility of presenter's (John Robinson) web site for visually impaired, screen reader user needs to test site. Brad and Lynn will test and notify presenter if problems (complaint needs to be verified). SRC has put \$1,000 towards the training, will be at Bangor Hilton Garden. Will have a "plated" dinner, as opposed to buffet.

VIII Committee Reports:

1. CSPD: Will meet again on May 15th.

2. Accessibility and Technology: Met twice and developing different pages for web site, sent pages to John Brandt and he's preparing it with rough drafts to see how they look. As they become more finished we can start to show it and collect comments and ideas.

3. Steering Committee: No comment.

4. Legislative: Talked here earlier about federal process; Rehab Act covered.

5. Membership: No one in pipeline, not a lot of leads. John sent e-mail to Rockland person, should know by end of week. Vacant seat for second VR counselor nonvoting. Alex Hall was sent some information but no reply. John will charge regional managers with finding present or past client for SRC seat.

6. Data collection: No report.

7. Consumer Satisfaction: Cheryl reported that Kelly sent a copy of General SRC questionnaire and asked us to make comments on that and we have, but next steps unclear.

8. SPNA: No report.

9. Bylaws: Nothing to report.

IX. Public comment: None.

X. Miscellaneous: John shared research findings from Mississippi that 38 percent of students who are blind or visually impair who have post secondary experience are employed. Of that percent only a third are working full-time. So we have a lot of folks out there with college backgrounds who are not getting jobs and it's a national thing. High impact statistic. Knowledge base is not what's lacking but the work ethic/blindness competencies.

XI. Adjournment: Brad moved to adjourn meeting. No second or discussion. All in favor, motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 3:54.