



**Andy Beshear**  
Governor

**Jamie Link**  
Education and Labor Cabinet Secretary

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## Advocacy and Education Subcommittee

Minutes

February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023

3:00pm – 4:00pm

[Zoom Link](#)

Meeting ID: 821 9479 4562

**Members Present:** Chari, Amanda Owen, Diana Merzweiler, Morgan Turner, Amanda Friend (Interpreters, Missy Miller, Sarah Grubb)

**Absent Members:** David Allgood, Jeff Edwards

**Staff Support:** Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) Vocational Rehabilitation Administrator II, Nanci Howard, KYOVR Vocational Rehabilitation Branch Manager, Michelle Cobb

**Staff Present:** None

Staff support, Nanci Howard, welcomed Amanda Owen, Amanda Friend and Michelle Cobb to the meeting and thanked them for their time. She let the attendees know that Diana Merzweiler would be signing into the meeting later. After introductions, Nanci Howard, gave a brief historical summary of the subcommittee and its previous work and identified some key areas of needs across Kentucky as listed below;

- Parents who still need accurate and complete information about what is available.
- Involvement of peer to peer supports, e.g., student to student, parent to parent
- Ensuring school systems understand OVR and resources available to students as well as processing for accessing

- Adequate, affordable and accessible transportation continues to be a key component for people with disabilities to be successfully employed

Nanci stated she had already emailed to Amanda Owen, an employment checklist that is utilized through the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute and encouraged members to actively engage in their role as subcommittee members. She gave additional ideas of what the subcommittee could direct their focus to as far as her personal vision for the subcommittee and then turned the meeting over to Chair, Amanda Owen.

## Highlights:

Chair, Amanda Owen, stated that she loved the UK checklist and shared her knowledge of the multiple grant funding sources that are presently available to “transition”. She went on to explain that the schools are failing at the transition level. Amanda further explained her activity within a local school system to conduct quarterly meetings/trainings in which the special education team and transition to work specialist discuss how to address discussions about transition, employment and Employment First at the primary levels of education. She explained that through her background in Special Education she realizes there is no curriculum to follow and that is a prime culprit in the failure to provide families and students with the information, resources and guidance to resolve this issue. Amanda went on to explain that there was a previous direction to have teachers add this issue to the IEP’s and then have a conversation with the parents at an IEP meeting however she does not feel that was an adequate solution. She explained that a possible solution would be to begin a personalized “employment portfolio” at the elementary school level and in addition to an IEP. This portfolio would give details regarding interest inventories, learning habits and other pertinent information and would be added to, at each grade advancement by the teacher for the length of the students’ academic career, in order to establish a clearer, consistent path of information transfer that can then be used to aid in transition and employment. Amanda Owen also mentioned that in addition to that concept, she is also targeting social skills and the end in mind to focus in on an individualized plan for each student. She then directed the discussion to Amanda Friend as a more skilled collaborator in the universal design that is needed for this project to cover the deaf population as well. Amanda Owen expressed her vision of producing power points, templates or flyers through combination of Employment First paired with education points and resulting in a CEU program which would mandate that the teachers are addressing these issues with students beginning at the primary level and continuing through the college levels of the student’s education career. She spoke about the value of having an imbedded power point which could be utilized across all organizational dynamics, to present the information consistently at any training, meeting or seminar. Amanda Owen stated that she did not believe flyers are an effective tool in communicating the value of the available OVR programs and that many students and parents are not even aware that employment is an option for their situation. Amanda Owen asked other subcommittee members to share their opinions, thoughts and insights on the matter.

Subcommittee member, Amanda Friend, stated that she appreciated and agreed with Amanda Owen’s viewpoints and shared her personal experience of school and what those frustrations entailed as it pertains to a disabled student’s academic career. She expressed that in the deaf and hard of hearing student groups, she sees teacher turnover as an issue resulting in an inconsistent or lack thereof transferring of knowledge from one professional to the next. Amanda Friend went on to explain that there were many other challenges that resulted from the vast turnover of teachers, manifested as inability or lack of ease in contacting/reaching teachers as well as having to repeat training sessions. She stated that she saw value in the CEU/CRP idea that was presented by Amanda Owen in earlier discussion. Amanda Friend went on to explain that she would be happy to

provide a training to the schools however in her experience, some schools are open to this opportunity whereas some are not. She stated that she didn't know of a way to partner with schools in order to set up these requirements.

Chair, Amanda Owen stated that she believes the burden of establishing requirements will fall to the Department of Education at the State level. She shared a personal experience of her own mandated requirements when she was in the Education field and mentioned that the schools would have to be accountable to administer these requirements as she did not feel the teachers would willingly take on the responsibility. She posed the question as to how this subcommittee could make this a district wide requirement or how they could "train the trainer" in order to establish a designate whom would be responsible to administer the training program(s) at the school levels to meet the proposed CEU requirements. She stated that this would alleviate the administrative burden of this proposal from the subcommittee and place it at the school(s) level where it could be more easily administered to staff. Amanda Owen shared information with the subcommittee related to a state produced portal that is in the works, and she posed the possibility of this subcommittee working with the State of Kentucky to produce an "app" that would compile and streamline Employment First ideals into an easy-to-use system where all the information could be available and easily accessed by the public. She spoke about the abundance of grant funding that is available at the present time and how this subcommittee could possibly use those resources to work towards this goal. Amanda Owen explained that the "app" is a dream and if a power point was a more feasible action step, she would like to work towards preparing action steps over the next 90 days in order to move forward in this process. She mentioned using Google Doc as a tool where subcommittee members could list important information about Employment First or other available resources that could be compiled into something that could be easily shared with the public. Amanda Owen asked if she should be taking notes during this meeting and Nanci Howard explained that the meeting was being recorded and stated that if this subcommittee chose to collaborate with the Transition Subcommittee regarding the transition issues mentioned in earlier discussion, she would be happy to facilitate a meeting between the two subcommittees to discuss those items. Nanci expressed her vision of having the chairs from all committees meet on a regular basis to share information about their progress and help to determine what information is shared through the annual report at the end of the year. Nanci Howard stated she was pleased with the discussions provided in the meeting and gave her guidance as to what the next steps could be for the subcommittee.

Nanci Howard introduced Morgan Turner to the subcommittee and explained that he had joined the meeting after earlier discussions had already begun. Morgan Turner then provided a brief introduction of himself to the subcommittee.

Chair, Amanda Owen turned the meeting over to Michelle Cobb for further comments or discussion.

Subcommittee member, Michelle Cobb expressed her support of the "app" idea. She stated that she was unaware and shocked that there was not a set curriculum for the teachers at the school level. Michelle went on to explain that there is a lack of serious consideration given to vocational interests regarding the disabled population at the adolescent level. She agreed with and is in support of beginning the cultivation of vocational interests process at the earlier stages of education with the goal of securing employment for these individuals at graduation.

There was brief discussion between Chair, Amanda Owen and Subcommittee member, Michelle Cobb regarding their excitement about the ideas shared during the meeting.

Chair, Amanda Owen mentioned that she would like the committee to meet once more and she

suggested using a Google Doc where subcommittee members could brainstorm all their ideas and information into a single place that they could then use at the next scheduled meeting, in hopes to prepare action or motion items that can then be presented to the Employment First Council, for consideration. She stated that she would like to see the following categories of information brought forward, regarding the materials that would be required to educate the consumers.

1 - Type of services

2 – Understanding behind employment

3 – Self Advocacy and understanding their rights

4 – Individual map or portfolio which begins at the kindergarten level and follows the student through their high school/college careers

Subcommittee member, Amanda Friend commented that the “app” was a great idea. She stated that many young people are already very comfortable using apps on their cell phones and she sees this as a quick way for the consumer to find the information. Amanda Friend explained that her vision for the app would be to add short videos or clips and possibly an interpreter service into the app, to assist the students in learning and engaging in the process. She went on to mention that she would like to develop surveys to allow the parents to engage within the app.

There was some discussion among subcommittee members about their excitement for the app and their vision as to how that tool would be helpful to consumers.

Nanci Howard asked the committee how she could be supportive and explained that she was unfamiliar with Google Docs. Chair, Amanda Owen offered to create a rough draft Google Doc that Nanci could distribute to the rest of the subcommittee members.

There was some brief discussion among subcommittee members, regarding Google Drive and how it could be accessed or utilized.

Chair, Amanda Owen gave her experiences of working alongside the Coalition to create a certificate program for Workforce to provide for local businesses to be more inclusive in their employment of the disabled population. She indicated that they are developing small training videos for employers to be more educated in working alongside someone with disabilities. Amanda Owen also mentioned that maybe this was something that could eventually be offered to teachers or schools. She also stated these training videos were something that could be developed into the “app” too and referred to Amanda Friend’s earlier suggestion regarding the short videos/clips.

Subcommittee member, Amanda Friend shared her experience in working with local interpreters who serve as outreach consultants and provide presentations of VR services for deaf or hard of hearing, to deaf or hard of hearing teachers. She expressed challenges that the program faced during covid and again referenced the turnover of teachers as being a negatively contributing factor.

There was discussion among the subcommittee members regarding the “train the trainer” concept and the responsibility of the school to be accountable to maintain a representative that is trained and can provide that training to other staff members. There was discussion about “turnover” and the challenges it poses to students regarding lack of consistency or knowledgeable point of contact, to assist them with questions or concerns. It was discussed that the portfolio idea, could aid to bridge

this disconnect between the turnover and the students' individualized plans by providing historical knowledge of the student's academic career and vocational interests to reduce downtime of progress made, due to the reacclimating of the onboarding teacher.

Nanci Howard introduced subcommittee member, Diana Merzweiler to the meeting and Dianna gave a brief introduction of herself to the subcommittee. Diana asked if she would be able to access the meeting recording and Nanci explained that the recording could be shared with the group however there would also be minutes provided to all members. Chair, Amanda Owen gave a recap of the meeting to Diana. Diana stated that the information recapped, sounded like a good, concise goal. There was discussion between Diana Merzweiler and Amanda Owen regarding the separate focus of information shared with parent versus teacher/staff, merging into a single focus to create consistency and transparency in the information being shared. There was mention of this matter being further discussed amongst the subcommittee to evaluate the pros and cons of this merger.

There was discussion among the subcommittee regarding the scheduling of the next meeting date in March. It was decided that the next meeting would be scheduled for Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> between 3:00-4:00 PM. Nanci Howard thanked the subcommittee for their ideas shared during the meeting and expressed her excitement for the goals discussed therein. She requested that Chair, Amanda Owen collaborate with her on the Google Doc and assured Diana Merzweiler that she would share the meeting recording and the minutes would be provided as soon as they are available. All committee members thanked each other, and the meeting was ended.

### *Issues identified:*

- Disconnect between KYOVR and school systems.
- Lack of curriculum at the school level.
- High rate of turnover at the education level

### *Future Areas of Focus:*

- Development of training program and materials or "app"
- Individual map or portfolio beginning at the kindergarten level
- Pros/Cons of merging information shared between parents and professionals.

### *Action Items:*

No motions were made during the meeting.

### *Next Meeting Date:*

Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
3:00pm – 4:00pm  
Zoom