

City of Pittsburgh/Allegheny County
Task Force on Disability
Monday, May 18, 2015
Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members in Attendance

Chris Noschese, Joe Wasserman, Katherine Seelman, Janet Evans, John Tague, Paul O’Hanlon, Karen Warmen, Sarah Goldstein

Task Force Members Absent

Aurelia Carter-Scott, Gabriel McMoreland, Jeff Parker, Richard McGann, Milton Henderson

Also in Attendance

Sharon Clarke, Shane Brown, Joy Dore, Michael Lampl, Jayla Irving, Ashley McFall, Richard Meritzer, Ali Abdullah, Amber Dean

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting began with the introduction of Task Force members and other individuals in attendance.

Review and Approval of Treasurer’s Report

Mr. Tague explained that the Task Force has excess funds to cover monthly meetings in May, June, and July. Mr. O’Hanlon asked if the budget left enough money for ADA 25th Anniversary celebrations. Mr. Tague responded that the Task Force was allocating about \$1,000 to the ADA celebrations, leaving about \$1,800 in the budget.

Ms. Evans discussed the lack of media attention on the progress in disability issues and suggested that the Task Force could consider funding more projects. Mr. O’Hanlon and Mr. Tague countered that the need to focus on one more project was a better plan. Mr. Meritzer and Mr. O’Hanlon discussed potential sources of sponsorship for the ADA celebration beyond the Task Force. Ms. Evans motioned to pass the budget. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Disability Agenda 2000 Retrospective

Mr. Meritzer introduced the discussion on the retrospective on the topic of primary and secondary education, which he described as how accessible public schools are now and where the public education system should be going. Panelist Amber Dean gave an overview of disabilities in public schools. She discussed the placement process for children who exhibit a necessity for learning help, the support and service provided outside of class, and general accommodations for students with disabilities on the level of primary schools.

Panelist Ashley McFall discussed the “Start on Success” program that prepared students with disabilities for careers and then placed them with real work for real pay in their senior year of high school. The program then extends through the age of 21, allowing students to “stay at school” in independent living situations volunteering and doing for-pay work. Ms. Goldstein asked about the criteria for the program, and Ms. McFall responded that the criteria aren’t specific and that numerous routes can be taken to fulfill the program’s goals. Mr. O’Hanlon asked about the role of community input in supporting the project and how the City-County Disability Task Force could assist. Ms. McFall replied that the

community and the Task Force were welcome to help as much as possible and that there needed to be a better way of matching students with appropriate programs. Mr. Meritzer brought up the issue of bullying and its negative correlation with education on the topic. Ms. Dean agreed and suggested that more education on disability topics would be helpful.

Ms. Dore asked about IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) and what they mean for autistic children. Ms. Dean discussed in response the needs of the child, the IDEA plan, LEAs, and yearly assessments to determine whether a child is being helped in the correct way. Mr. Noschese discussed the use of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation starting at 15 with mentoring, and Ms. Dean added that Southwestern Pennsylvania has a nationally-praised program that is looking to expand. Dr. Seelman asked about suspension and detention policies. Ms. Dean added that they are somewhat severe and that the program is looking to replace them with something better. The special needs-adaptive sports programs in schools like Allerdice and Brashear consist of track and field teams of both disabled and non-disabled students and have yet to experience problems with equipment or funding.

Mr. O'Hanlon asked Ms. Irving about the IEP program and how well it worked. Ms. Irving replied that they do, although the pace of work was often too much and not enough support was provided. Mr. Wasserman asked about the percent of disabled children in the region's primary and secondary schools who have visual impairments, to which Ms. Dean replied approximately two percent. Mr. Wasserman then asked about TVIs (Teachers of students with Visual Impairments), and Ms. Dean elaborated that students with TVIs receive hybrid educations and are evaluated individually.

Mr. O'Hanlon inquired about the accessibility of primary and secondary schools in the region. Ms. Dean informed him that all but five buildings are accessible. Dr. Seelman asked about the wiring of buildings, to which Ms. Dean replied that the buildings are attempting to go wireless and contain a degree of technology throughout.

Presentation on Disability Mentoring Day

Mr. Meritzer gave a brief overview of the history of Disability Mentoring Days, beginning in 1999 and being held every third Wednesday in October. The program itself places younger individuals with disabilities with local employers. Ms. Warmen asked about the contact information for the event, and was told about Bender Consulting, a company Mr. Noschese endorsed. Mr. Abdullah made the distinction between entrepreneurship for individuals with disabilities and the work disabled individuals do for Bender.

Dr. Seelman asked about how these programs interact with social security benefits and supplemental income. Mr. Noschese responded that in many cases benefits from these programs would be cut, but that nevertheless Bender also provides for most costs incurred from loss of health and other benefits. Ms. Evans and Mr. Abdullah brought up the additions to the former Skyline terrace homes near the YMCA in the Hill District that have now allocated five percent of their new housing to specific need-based living situations.

Update on Oakland for All Ramp Crawl

Ms. Warmen recapped "ramp crawl" sponsored by Oakland for All on May 5. Mr. Meritzer lauded the event as a success, saying that around fifteen people came to the event. Dr. Seelman, Mr. Tague, and Mr. O'Hanlon all praised the event. Ms. Dore complained that the ramp crawl lacked an interpreter for sign language. Mr. Meritzer apologized for the overlook and promised to look into addressing the issue.

Vox Pop

Mr. Noschese brought up the disability issues still unresolved at the airport and the courthouse, saying that all public buildings should provide captioning where applicable. Mr. O'Hanlon and Mr. Meritzer agreed that captioning in public buildings is a legal requirement and said they would work on it. Mr. Abdullah mentioned that the County Disability Compliance office is working to educate landlords about accommodating disabled renters and pledged his help for an ADA legacy tour bus. Mr. O'Hanlon voiced support for continuing the votership program that allows those in hospitals and otherwise unable to report to polling places to vote and Ms. Dore mentioned the need for interpreters at the Carnegie Library in Oakland.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 P.M. The next meeting will be held on Monday, June 15, at 1:00 P.M.