

**State Rehabilitation Council
to the New York State
Commission for the Blind**

**Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2016/2017**

Introduction

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) is pleased to issue its Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 2016/2017 to Governor Andrew Cuomo and Deputy Commissioner Edward Anthony of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This report includes a discussion of the Council's activities during FY 2016/2017 and plans for the upcoming FY 2017/2018.

The SRC ("the Council") is an advisory body mandated by Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The nature and scope of the Council's deliberations and recommendations include NYSCB policies, procedures, and operations as they may affect consumers of or applicants for agency services statewide. Additionally, the SRC assists in the development of federally required State plans and annual updates to those plans. Much of the Council's business has been conducted in committees focusing on the NYSCB priority issues of work force development; quality assurance; policy, procedure and planning; transition to adulthood; and SRC membership. The SRC meets once each calendar quarter.

The Council is comprised of members representing consumers who are blind, consumers with multiple disabilities, parents, disability advocacy groups (National Federation of the Blind and American Council of the Blind), Disability Rights New York (DRNY) and its Client Assistance Program (CAP), community rehabilitation program service providers, New York State Educational Department, business, industry and labor, the New York State Workforce Investment Board, Section 121 Native American Rehabilitation Programs, and New York State Independent Living. Ex-Officio representation on the Council includes Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR), the NYS Justice Center and various representatives from NYSCB who provide information and assistance as requested by the Council.

Meetings are open to the public and always include a public comment segment during which individuals are invited to provide input or bring issues of concern to the Council's attention.

**Functions of the State Rehabilitation Council
(as stated in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act)**

The Council shall, after consulting with the State Workforce Investment Board —

1. Review, analyze, and advise the designated State unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit under this title, particularly responsibilities related to:
 - a. eligibility (including order of selection)
 - b. the extent, scope, and effectiveness of services provided; and
 - c. functions performed by State agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes under this title;

2. In partnership with the designated State unit —
 - a. develop, agree to, and review State goals and priorities in accordance with section 101 (a)(15) (C); and
 - b. evaluate the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program and submit reports of progress to the Commissioner in accordance with section 101(a)(15)(E);

3. Advise the designated State agency and the designated State unit regarding activities authorized to be carried out under this title, and assist in the preparation of the State plan and amendments to the plan, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations required by this title;
 - a. To the extent feasible, conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with —the functions performed by the designated State agency
 - b. vocational rehabilitation services provided by State agencies and other public and private entities responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities under this Act; and
 - c. employment outcomes achieved by eligible individuals receiving services under this title, including the availability of health and other employment benefits in connection with such employment outcomes;

4. Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner on the status of vocational rehabilitation programs operated within the State, and make the report available to the public;

5. To avoid duplication of efforts and enhance the number of individuals served, coordinate activities with the activities of other councils within the State, including the Statewide Independent Living Council established under section 705, the advisory panel established under section 612(a)(21) of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (as amended by section 101 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997; Public Law 105-17, the State Developmental Disabilities Council described in section 124 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 6024), the State Mental Health Planning Council established under section 1914 (a) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 300x-4(a)), and the State workforce investment board;

6. Provide for coordination and the establishment of working relationships between the designated State agency and the Statewide Independent Living Council and centers for independent living within the state; and
7. Perform such other functions, consistent with the purpose of this title, as the State Rehabilitation Council determines to be appropriate, that are comparable to the other functions performed by the Council.

Meeting Highlights and Activities for FY 2016/2017

Listed below are meeting highlights and activities for 2016/2017 including participation in the development of the Combined State Plan, recommendations, public forums, communication with the NYSCB Executive Board, and presentations.

The NYSCB SRC conducts its council business at four (4) quarterly meetings each year. At each of these meetings the Council follows an agenda created and proposed by the Council's Executive Committee. A standard agenda consists of introductions, report from the Chair, report from the Associate Commissioner, presentations, public comment, committee reports, council business, and action items. The following is a brief synopsis of the SRC business for FY 2016/2017.

MEETING ONE: November 16 & 17, 2016

The fiscal year began with the first quarterly meeting in November. Chair Theresa Drum and Vice Chair Chancey Fleet welcomed the members back for the new fiscal year 2016/2017.

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

The SRC is kept well informed of NYSCB and its reporting processes to the State and RSA by NYSCB Associate Commissioner Brian Daniels. In his report, the Associate Commissioner informed the Council that for the eighth consecutive year, NYSCB increased the number of remunerative closures; the increase for 2016 over the prior year was 2.75%. Mr. Daniels informed the Council that a vendor was selected for the needs assessment and a contract was in process. Information was shared about the Open Forums held in Buffalo, Albany and Manhattan which resulted in feedback regarding adaptive technology and accessibility. The Business Employment Program's (BEP) facilitated trainings at the Hadley School for the Blind continued to receive positive feedback.

Other Presentations/Activities

- Chair Comments included: an update on the collaboration between NYSCB and ACCES-VR's SRCs and a plan for a joint meeting in June; plans to increase communication with the Executive Board; draft a list of specific concerns to be included in a letter to ACCES-VR regarding the accessibility of the High School Equivalency exam (TASC); and a request that each committee contribute details on a workplan toward their goals.
- The Council reviewed the annual report.
- Nancy Damoretcki, Transition Specialist at Capital Region BOCES, provided a presentation on Supporting Students in the Transition to Postsecondary Success
- Peter Herrig and Sharon Flom provided an update on work relating to WIOA, including meetings of the WIOA team, approved submittal of the Combined State Plan, work toward accessible workstations at career centers and work toward gathering and aligning data from the program partners to submit to RSA for performance measures.
- Lauren Corp provided an update on Transition activities including two pre-college programs offered at LeMoyne and Manhattanville Colleges over the summer and the work of the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), exploring options for an online portal or website with resources.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: Did not meet this day; followed up on different date.
- AT Taskforce: Erica Molina reported that the committee reviewed feedback from NYSCB regarding the Assistive Technology (AT) Center contracts in preparation for the next RFP.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: Chris Kchao reviewed the committee's goals and plans
- Workforce Development: Debbie Fiderer reported the committee's recommendation to fill more business, labor and industry seats on the Council
- Transition Committee: Maria Mucaria reported the committee would conduct a survey for the seven transition counselors across the state

Public Comments

none

MEETING TWO: March 16, 2017

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

Brian Daniels reported to the Council that NYSCB continues to pursue new BEP Managers. NYSCB met with The State Committee of Blind Vendors, which sought ways to more actively engage the counseling staff with the BEP program. OCFS is supportive of promotion efforts to the media. Recommendations made by the SRC Assistive Technology (AT) Task Force were reviewed by NYSCB staff on various issues. Mr. Daniels also reported that the Assistive Technology Center Request for Proposals (ATC RFP) was ready for release in the near future. NYSCB continued to work with the State Workforce Investment Board and enhanced the relationship with other state agencies in response to the changes presented by WIOA.

Other Presentations/Activities

- Chair Comments included information about the Council's concerns regarding the current accessibility limitations for individuals who are blind when taking the Test of Assessment of Secondary Completion (TASC). Members of the Council plan to collaborate to create a list of crucial points for a letter to be sent to ACCES-VR/NYSED.
- Kevin Smith, Deputy Commissioner at Adult Career and Continuing Education Services, attended the meeting to discuss the changes in the high school equivalency exam requirements, the current test, testing accommodations, and vendor and the barriers that exist for individuals who are blind. Mr. Smith showed a strong commitment to working with NYSCB to create solutions.
- Geri Walsh, Disability Resource Coordinator, Career Central and John Banas, Disability Resource Coordinator, Schenectady County One Stop, provided a presentation about Disability Resource Coordinators and Career Centers working with NYSCB.
- WIOA update: Peter Herrig and Sharon Flom reported that all WIOA partners have looked at the Memorandum of Understanding for local workforce boards and Career Centers. Also discussed was the provision requiring counseling and guidance to all New Yorkers with all disabilities who are working at subminimum wages. Activities of the training subcommittee included a look into cross training all staff from the WIOA partner programs. The data integration committee addressed the WIOA requirement for joint reporting of performance measures.
- The Chairs and Co-Chairs of NYSCB and ACCES VR SRCs planned to meet to discuss topics for the joint session at the June meeting.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: Did not meet this day; followed up on different date.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: Chris Kchao reported that their goal was to identify areas of opportunity for improvement within the existing accommodations framework.
- Workforce Development: Debbie Fiderer reported that a survey investigating the current level of career center use by blind jobseekers is complete and scheduled to be distributed with data prepared for the next meeting.
- Transition Committee: The Committee reported on action items for the year including the creation and distribution of a survey for the seven transition counselors regarding quality of coordinated activities for student's transition planning.
- AT Task Force: The group reported that the ATC RFP was in the process of being reviewed.

Public Comments

Brian Wolynski, an Optometrist from Manhattan, commented about policies regarding NYS certification requirements for Optometrists and shared that other medical professionals such as Ophthalmologists do not need a certification.

MEETING THREE: June 21 and 22, 2017

NYSCB/ACCES-VR Executive Committees met for the first time on June 21st and shared common goals, visions for the future and potential opportunities to collaborate. The full Councils met jointly for a period of time on June 22nd.

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

Brian Daniels reported that the 2017 Vision Rehabilitation Institute was successful and planning for 2018 was underway. The potential for cosponsors was discussed. Mr. Daniels informed the Council that District Offices are fully staffed with District Managers.

Other Presentations/Activities

- A formal letter from the Council was sent to Kevin Smith at ACCES VR/NYSED outlining specific concerns and barriers to accessibility regarding the Test of Academic Secondary Completion (TASC) with the request to include the recommended requirements in the RFP that was in process.
- Judy Katzen and Jacque Suh from The Catholic Guild for the Blind provided feedback on consumer experiences throughout the TASC test preparation process. Barriers experienced by consumers were shared including the difficulty of obtaining testing modifications and challenges with accessibility.
- WIOA update: Peter Herrig and Sharon Flom shared information regarding NYS Department of Labor including an update on memorandums of understanding and infrastructure funding. Also, reported on was a focus on assistive technology in the 96 Career Centers across the state to compose a uniformed list of technology and plan for staff training.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: Did not meet this day; followed up on different date.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: Chris Kchao reported that work continues on the goal to identify areas of opportunity for improvement within the existing accommodations framework.
- Workforce Development: The Committee's survey was completed. Results showed that most NYSCB counselors do not refer to Career Centers for services or to utilize their services
- Transition Committee: The Committee's survey to the transition counselors was distributed.
- Membership Committee: Members in the following areas are needed: Section 121 Tribal VR, Business, Industry and Labor.
- AT Task Force: The Committee reported that the ATC RFP was still in the process of being reviewed. The work of the task force will be extended through March 2018.

Public Comments

None

MEETING FOUR: September 27 and 28, 2017

A look back on the year highlighted several accomplishments of the Council. A workplan for committee progress was implemented with success. The relationship with the ACCES-VR SRC was strengthened; this resulted in valuable sharing of information and strategies. The Council also successfully fostered a partnership with NYSED/ACCES-VR in regards to ensuring accessibility for high school equivalency exams.

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

Brian Daniels provided updates on the BEP and the Annual Blind Vendors' Meeting at which 30 NYSCB staff attended. Mr. Daniels announced that the ATC contracts were awarded to seven agencies across NYS. He provided information regarding the upcoming open forums held at the American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind annual conferences.

Other Presentations/Activities

- Chair Drum's comments commended the Council Members of their dedication and hard work throughout the year. In addition, Ms. Drum read the response letter from NYSED/ACCES' Deputy Commissioner, Kevin Smith regarding concerns about the TASC
- David Dodge from The Independent Living of the Genesee Region provided information regarding Diversity in Disability Sharing Universal Design Principles with the Community.
- TASC discussion included strategies to identify potential trial test takers to provide feedback regarding accessibility utilizing various testing accommodations that would be representative of the needs of individuals who are blind. Recommendations included a Teacher of the Visually Impaired, a test administrator and someone from the vendor, Data Recognition Corporation (DRC).
- Timothy Jones, Program Manager for the High School Equivalency Office of NYSED, is the point of contact for the TASC vendor. A brief history of the High School Equivalency RFP was provided; the new test will be released on January 18, 2018. Mr. Jones reported that NYSED is very committed to providing necessary testing accommodations and that computer-based testing with built-in accessibility features is a priority. The vendor, DRC, has online tools for test takers to utilize to prepare for the test that can be found at <https://wbte.drcedirect.com/TASC/portals/tasc>. Mr. Jones echoed Kevin Smith's commitment to work with NYSCB and will research answers and respond to questions provided to him by the SRC.
- Kenneth Jones, IT Support Specialist and Web from Adaptive Technology Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany, provided information on the step by step process for obtaining assistive technology from referral to completion.
- Election of Officers - Nominating Committee: Meghan Parker was nominated and elected SRC Chair with no other nominees. There were three nominees for Co-Vice Chairs, resulting in the election of Chris Kchao and Debbie Fiderer for the 2017-2018 term.
- WIOA update: Peter Herrig and Julianne Venneman provided updates the MOUs with the local workforce areas, the majority of which were signed, the completion of a list of recommended accessible technology tools by the accessibility workgroup and the data integrations and the review of the Combined State Plan which will require updates or revisions as part of the two-year modification.

- The SRC voted and the motion passed unanimously to provide full privilege of discussion at all meetings attended by Executive Board representatives or assigned consultants whose presence is funded by NYSCB.
- Carena Collura, Liaison from The Executive Board, reported that the Executive Board is working with NYS Department of Health (DOH) to provide vision screening for young children. They are also looking into cortical visual impairment, LBGTQ community with visual impairments, and transportation in the Niagara region.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: While the committee did not meet, the Chair Erica Molina reported that she had met with Mr. Daniels and Julie Hovey about updating the Quality Assurance procedures. The Committee goals will be continued.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: Chris Kchao reported that addressing the TASC has been the most important objective of the Committee. The Committee goals will be continued.
- Workforce Development: The Committee reported their goals for the year were met and new goals will be determined.
- Transition Committee: The Committee reported their goal for the year was met and a new goal will be determined based on the results from the survey.
- AT Task Force: Feedback was provided for the RFP and the ATC manual will be reviewed with comments provided.

Public Comments

None

Planned Goals and Activities for FY2017/2018:

The SRC is scheduled to meet quarterly in FY 2017/18. In addition, the Executive Committee and each of the four standing committees will meet via conference call throughout the year. The Assistive Technology Task Force will remain in effect through March of 2018.

The standing committees are: Quality Assurance; Policy, Procedure and Planning; Workforce Development and Transition. Chair Parker will appoint the Chairs and members of each committee and will give each its charge. The Assistive Technology Task Force will continue its work until March 2018. The Executive Committee will ensure that membership will continue to include qualified, diverse candidates to fill new positions or vacancies on the Council.

Below are several goals the Council plans to work on during the next year via its committees and AT Task Force, in keeping with mandated requirements.

Assistive Technology Task Force

Goal 1: Positively affect NYSCB's internal AT service infrastructure with regard to the approval of, timely provision of, and training on AT products for those NYSCB clients seeking to obtain or maintain employment.

Goal 2: Positively affect the accessibility of information and communications technology (ICT) services and systems for the blind community as related to their obtaining and maintaining employment.

Quality Assurance Committee

Goal 4: Review the most recent Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the most recent Needs Assessment and generate recommendations to NYSCB based on their results.

Goal 5: Assist in the development of a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of NYSCB's outreach efforts to healthcare professionals and pre-service students.

Policy, Procedures, and Planning Committee

Goal 6: Closely collaborate with NYSCB, working with NYSED to include explicit language in all future state contracts pertaining to full accessibility of high stakes testing and instructional materials.

Goal 7: Work with NYSCB to make intake materials available on National Library Service (NLS) cartridges. Explore the possibility of including voluntary registration for NLS as part of the intake process for prospective consumers who may not already be NLS patrons.

Goal 8: Work with NYSCB to ensure proper and full implementation of policies regarding dissemination of materials in alternative/accessible formats.

Goal 9: Research other state legislation that provides for the procurement of accessible information and communications technologies. Report back to SRC and NYSCB about potential best practices and strategies for advocacy.

Workforce Development Committee

Goal 10: Review the use of Supported Employment services state-wide by blind and visually impaired job seekers with multiple disabilities and make recommendations for improving efficacy of service provision.

Goal 11: Provide feedback and recommendations related to implementation of WIOA regulations

Transition Committee

Goal 12: Utilize the completed survey from FY2016/2017 to create recommendations for statewide transition counselors.

Other Planned Activities in FY 2017/2018

The SRC will participate with NYSCB in revising the combined State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year 2017/2018. The participation will include information gathering from its members' respective constituencies. The 2017/2018 State Plan will incorporate information obtained at the public forums held at the ACB and NFB state conventions as well as any other public hearings held by NYSCB.

The SRC will continue to support and advise NYSCB in its collaboration with ACCES-VR to ensure full accessibility in test preparation and test taking for the high school equivalency test (TASC).

The SRC will re-examine its current by-laws to determine whether any amendments or restructuring may be needed.

The SRC will continue new member training at one of the quarterly meetings based on the timeliness of appointments each Fiscal Year hereafter.

The SRC and its committees will collaborate with the ACCES-VR SRC to ensure the implementation of the Combined State Plan goals.

In addition, the SRC will work to strengthen connections with other SRC's outside New York State, as well as with the National Coalition of SRC's and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind.

Finally, the SRC will work with NYSCB to bring about implementation of the various recommendations made by the committees and Council as a whole. Many of the recommendations of the committees overlap with each other as well as with those of the NYSCB Executive Board. Communication and brainstorming among the members of all of these bodies will further refine their recommendations, and thereby result in an across-the-board improvement in services and opportunities for New Yorkers who are blind.