New Mexico Commission for the Blind

State Rehabilitation Council

MINUTES (Final)

Regular Meeting

Commission for the Blind

2200 Yale Blvd. SE

Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

July 20, 2023 - 9:00 AM

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Chavez called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM.

2. Roll Call

Ms. Lila Martinez took roll. Physically Present were Katharine Chavez, Mario Hooee, Greg Trapp, Jeff Blair, Daphne Mitchell, James Babb, Paul Luttrell, Paula Seanez, and Veronica Alonzo. Bernadine Chavez, Peggy Hayes, and Lila Martinez attended by Zoom. Deborah Dominguez-Clark was absent.

3. Introduction of Guests and Staff

Staff present were Kelly Burma, Skills Center Coordinator and SRC Liaison; Patricia Savage, Executive Secretary; Kevin Romero, Deputy Director for Finance and Administration. Staff present over Zoom were Jim Salas, Deputy Director for Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living, and Jamie Sibson, Orientation Center Director. Guests present over Zoom were Ernie Esquibel, President of the Albuquerque Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind; Leslie Hernandez, APS Teacher; and Diana Marquez.

4. Approval of Possible Changes to the Agenda Order and Tabling of Agenda Items

There were no changes to the agenda.

5. Approval of Minutes for the Meeting of April 5 and 6, 2023

Jim Babb moved to approve the minutes of the April 5 and 6 meeting, and Mario Hooee seconded the motion. Mr. Trapp said the Council was now meeting in-person, and that a roll call vote was no longer necessary. A vote was taken, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

6. Client Assistance Program Report, Bernadine Chavez

Ms. Bernadine Chavez said CAP received one call from the Commission during the quarter. She said the consumer’s case was closed because the consumer was moving to another state. She said the Commission had done a good job of contacting the other state and had gone above and beyond in helping the consumer.

Mr. Salas said the Commission will coordinate with the other state when a consumer is moving from New Mexico and will allow the consumer to keep any computer equipment that the consumer might have. He said the Commission works to make sure there is a smooth clean handoff.

Mr. Trapp said there was no way for the Commission to legally serve a consumer who was no longer a resident of New Mexico and who was also no longer physically present in the state. He said it would be like being asked to serve a person who was a resident of Texas and who was going to school in Mississippi. Mr. Trapp said he appreciated the relationship that the Commission has with the Client Assistance Program. Noting that the Council has new members, he described the nature and purpose of the CAP program, saying that the Commission was required to notify consumers of the availability of CAP at stages such as eligibility, when the case is closed, and when services are denied. Mr. Trapp said he would be more concerned if there were no consumers who were contacting CAP.

Ms. Chavez thanked Mr. Trapp for helping to publicize the DRNM public forums. She said one was held in Farmington, and that Commission staff came and were very helpful.

7. Section 121 Project Report, Paula Seanez

Ms. Seanez gave her 121 Project report. As a part of her report, she said CANAR, the Consortia of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation, would be meeting in Albuquerque, and she invited the Commission to participate.

8. Workforce Board Report, Veronica Alonzo

Ms. Alonzo reported on behalf of the State Workforce Board, saying she was excited to be on the Council. She reported on various programs and initiatives of the Workforce Solutions Department. She also described the process of the development of the Combined State Plan, saying regional gatherings were being held, including recently in Ruidoso and Las Cruces. She said next week meetings will be held in Espinola or Santa Fe, and also in Albuquerque. She said dates were also being set for public input meetings. She also reported on apprenticeship and Level Up programs being conducted by the Workforce Solutions Department, saying they were for youth aged 16 to 24.

Mr. Luttrell asked about the Level Up program, and Ms. Alonzo said it was a way of leveling up the skills of youth in the hospitality and tourism sectors.

9. Chairperson’s Report, Katharine Chavez

Chairperson Chavez said she was stepping down as Council Chairperson due to her appointment to the Commission for the Blind board, and increased job responsibilities. She thanked the Council for their vote of confidence, saying she would continue to serve on the Council.

10. Election of Chair

Ms. Bernadine Chavez nominated Mario Hooee for Council Chairperson, and Mr. Hooee declined.

Mr. Babb nominated Peggy Hayes for Council Chairperson, and Mr. Luttrell seconded the motion. Chairperson Chavez called for additional nominations three times, and with none being made Mr. Babb moved that Ms. Hayes be elected by acclamation and Mr. Hooee seconded the motion. Ms. A vote was taken, and Hayes was unanimously elected as Chairperson.

11. Director's Report, Greg Trapp

a. Major Trends and Developments, Greg Trapp

Mr. Trapp thanked Ms. Katharine Chavez for her willingness to serve as Council Chairperson, and also for her willingness to serve on the Commission Board. He also congratulated Ms. Hayes for her reappointment to the Council and her election as Chairperson.

Mr. Trapp said that the new OSERS Secretary is Glenna Wright-Gallo, saying she has served as the special education director in Utah and in Washington. He said the confirmation of the RSA Commissioner is still pending.

Mr. Trapp said a Dear Colleague Letter was sent out on June 23 by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. He said it redefined the definition of recipient for purposes of determining match, and that it will have a profound impact on states with a General and Blind agency. He said that historically a Blind agency would put up its match, and if it had sufficient match and unspent federal funds, those unspent funds could be carried over to the second year of the two-year period of performance. He said that now the state as a whole must meet the match requirement. He said the Commission could now find itself wanting to carryover funds, but not be able to because DVR had not met its match requirement. He said that the Commission has some flexibility this year because the funds spent on constructing the apartment in Alamogordo and the gender-neutral restroom in Albuquerque can count as a source of match. Mr. Trapp said the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind has sent a letter to RSA expressing concerns about the Dear Colleague Letter, and that fact that it did not follow a more formal rule making process. Mr. Trapp said the Commission sent RSA a letter asking if VR agencies relinquishing funds during the reallotment process in August of each year would reset the match level, and that RSA said the match would be based on the amount after any relinquishment of funds. He said that the inability to carryover funds could also have an impact on the ability to spend the Pre-ETS reserve as there is a two year period of performance.

Mr. Trapp said the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind has sent a letter to Congress on the Older Individuals who are Blind grant, pointing out that the program only gets $33 million for the entire country and is very underfunded. He said the President’s FY 2024 budget proposes to increase the OIB funding from $33.3 million to $38.3 million.

Mr. Trapp said the Commission just completed a Pre-ETS activity in which nine students participated in seminars about careers in the music and entertainment industry. He said it went really well and had six sessions.

Daphne said she thought it went well, and that it showed that a person did not have to be a performer but be in other roles. She said one of the highlights was a virtual choir.

b. Administration and Finance, Kevin Romero

Mr. Romero talked about the reallotment process, saying it went from July 14 through August 15. He said VR agencies that could not use all of their federal allotment of funds were authorized to relinquish those funds so that the funds could be distributed to other state VR agencies that put in a request for those funds. He said RSA encouraged Blind and General agencies to check if the other agency could use or match the state, in which case the funding could remain in the state. He said an agency that relinquishes funding will also reduce the amount of the Pre-ETS reserve.

Mr. Romero reported on spending during Federal Fiscal Year 23, saying the agency had spent about half of the federal VR grant, or about $2.4 million of a $5.7 million award. He said about $2.8 million is currently unspent. He described how obligations impacted on the spending of the award, saying it was the subject of a Community of Practice meeting sponsored by the VRTAC-QM. He said obligated but unspent funds constitute an attrition rate, and that the funds are then returned to the Treasury after the end of the year. He said the Commission works with DVR to make sure that funds are maximized.

Reporting further on FFY23, Mr. Romero said 1.2 million is under current obligation, leaving a balance of about $1.7 million. He said he would like to carryover about two or three months of operational costs.

Mr. Trapp said there can be some instances when it is appropriate to lapse federal VR funds, saying the Commission has in the past lapsed an amount equal to the exact amount of the unspent Pre-ETS reserve. He said this was noted in the Annual Review finding, saying it was actually a complement of the Commission because it showed that the Commission was accurately tracking its finances. Mr. Trapp said the Pre-ETS reserve was too much for Blind agencies, adding that the Commission only had about 50 or 60 students who were eligible to receive Pre-ETS services.

Mr. Blair asked what it meant to lapse funds, and Mr. Trapp said it refers to federal funds that were neither spent nor relinquished. He said Mr. Romero talked about funds that were lapsed, though he did not use that term. Mr. Trapp said that lapsing funds means that the agency does not reduce the Pre-ETS amount. He said it is much better to relinquish funds instead of lapsing funds. He said lapsed funds go to the Treasury, and do not go to RSA for redistribution to other VR agencies. He said the VR program at the national level has been unable to spend a significant amount of the VR grant.

Ms. Seanez asked about the process of transferring funds between agencies prior to reallotment, saying she understood that DVR would be relinquishing funds. Mr. Romero said he has been informed that DVR was looking at relinquishing over $3 million in VR funds. He said the Commission was working with DVR to see if they could use some of the Commission’s match.

Mr. Babb asked about the amount that could be spent on equipment, saying he thought it was $5,000. Mr. Trapp said this was the prior approval threshold, and he and Mr. Romero described the prior approval process, with Mr. Romero describing the aggregate process. Mr. Trapp said that a FAQ was issued that gives prior approval for equipment that is over $5,000 if it is a part of an IPE. Mr. Trapp said the agency was needing to request prior approval for technology purchases for the Skills Center and Orientation Center because of the way in which individual components are counted.

Mr. Blair asked if the spending difficulties were due to a lack of staff, and Mr. Trapp said it was not. Mr. Trapp said the Pre-ETS mandate was part of the problem, and he described the restrictions on Pre-ETS spending such as the requirement that it be spent on an actual student who is in a recognized educational program, and the prohibition on spending the Pre-ETS reserve on tuition. He said that 47 VR agencies did not meet the Pre-ETS spending requirement.

Mr. Romero reported on the close of the state fiscal year, saying bills were still being paid for the state fiscal year. He said that as of today, the Commission has spent $16,611,700, which is a large increase from the prior state fiscal year. He said this spending increase is due to easing of the pandemic restrictions, and also increases in costs and prices. He said the $16,611,700 is roughly 98 percent of the budget appropriated for State Fiscal Year 23. He said this is an increase from spending roughly 80 percent of the budget, to spending 98 percent of the budget. He said this spending shows that the agency is using the appropriated funds to meet the needs of the consumer. Mr. Romero said he is working on the request budget for State Fiscal Year 25, and that the request budget is due September 1.

Mr. Romero reported on Human Resources, saying the Commission currently has 12 vacant positions, 7 of which are classified and 5 of which are exempt. He said this gives the agency an overall vacancy rate of 13 percent, and just 10.9 for classified positions. He said the Commission was currently working to fill six classified positions.

Mr. Romero reported on office leases, saying the agency was working with the General Services Department to relocate the Las Cruces office to a facility that will better meet the needs of the agency. He said there were other agencies such as DVR and Workforce Solutions at the new location.

c. Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation, Jim Salas

Mr. Salas said Barbara Cane retired as a Blindness Skills Instructor in Las Cruces. He said she was a crackerjack employee, and that she will really be missed. He said he is working to fill her vacant position. Mr. Salas said that the Business Consultant position for the BEP Program in Albuquerque is still vacant.

Mr. Salas said the agency was working to revise the rules for the BEP program. He said the agency is determined to update the BEP Manual. Mr. Salas described the Randolph Sheppard Act, mentioning the facilities at Kirtland Air Force Base and at the federal law enforcement training facility in Artesia.

Mr. Salas reported on the Students in Transition to Employment program, asking Daphne Mitchell to update the Council. Ms. Mitchell said STEP began the summer with 35 students and was now down to 32 students. She said one of the students who exited STEP did so because the student found a permanent job. Ms. Mitchell described some of the jobs performed by the students, including a student working in landscaping, one student who was placed at the Rio Rancho Chamber of Commerce, one student who was working at a law firm in Roswell, a student who was working at a pottery company, and a student who was working as an auto mechanic. Mr. Salas said the Commission offers students the ability to continue working beyond the months of June and July.

Mr. Salas reported on placements for the federal fiscal year, saying 13 consumers were placed in integrated and competitive employment. He said the average wage for these consumers was $20.05 per hour. He said two more closures were being processed, and that he expected to have about 20 closures by the end of the federal fiscal year in September. Reporting on closures for the state fiscal year, he said there was a total of 26 persons placed in competitive and integrated employment, and one person placed in self-employment, for a total of 27. He said the average starting wage for these consumers was $22.90 per hour. He said that 25 consumers were currently in employment status and stable and likely to be closed in the near future, and 16 consumers were in Service E status who were employed but did not have a stable date.

Mr. Salas described the types of jobs that consumers were placed in along with their wages. He said a majority of placements were at 40 hours a week. He said the types of jobs included one agricultural or forestry worker, one farm worker, three janitors or cleaners, one housekeeping, one human services, one office clerk, one switchboard operator, one dispatcher, one budget analyst, one financial analyst, five post-secondary teachers, Two Teachers and instructors, one teachers aid, one therapist, one vocational and educational counselor, one computer scientist, and one general manager and top executive.

d. Orientation Center, Jamie Sibson

Ms. Sibson said the Orientation Center is currently running its STEP program with five students. She reported on the workplace learning placements, saying they included a veterinary clinic and a hardware store. She said the students receive two days of blindness skills training at the Orientation Center, and work three days a week. She said the students do center activities on Saturdays. She said the STEP program is going very well and the students have really enjoyed it. She said the students have embraced the training, and are using the skills they have learned through their workdays, through their activities, and during their free time.

Ms. Sibson said the adult training will start on August 14. She said two of the students will be going into the apartments. She said this is exciting because this is the first time students will be in the new apartment building. Ms. Sibson said four students will return in August, and four new students are scheduled to start at the end of August or early September. She said two tours are also scheduled for August and September. She said two staff members will be returning to complete their immersion training.

e. Skills Center, Kelly Burma

Ms. Burma said the Skills Center has transitioned to the STEP program. She said the Skills Center is serving STEP students at various times throughout the week, depending on the student’s work schedule. Ms. Burma described the training taking place at the Skills Center.

Ms. Burma said the Technology for Children Program has served 14 students in FY23. She said the Technology for Children Program is funded in partnership with the Department of Health and allows the Commission to provide technology for children to use at home.

She said that durable medical equipment is available through insurance for disabilities other than blindness. She said that means blind students cannot receive a video magnifier through their health insurance.

Mr. Trapp said the Technology for Children Program is a very different kind of program that is operated by the Commission, but it is working to equip the students to be better prepared for the future. Ms. Burma said there are more students who are being homeschooled or sent to Charter schools, and these students can especially benefit from the program.

Ms. Burma said the Commission will be continuing its National Certification in Unified English Braille activities. She said the Commission will be announcing dates in the fall for the NCUEB exams. She said the Skills Center works extensively with the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. She said the Skills Center will also provide a forensics camp for Pre-ETS students.

Mr. Babb asked if the Skills Center uses Seeing AI. Ms. Burma answered yes, saying is important to teach the pros and cons of apps such as Seeing AI, AIRA and Be My Eyes.

12. Unfinished Business

a. Report on Rehabilitation Services Administration Annual Review and Pre-ETS Finding, Greg Trapp and Kevin Romero

Mr. Trapp said RSA was authorized to monitor the rehabilitation program under Section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act, including annual reviews. He said RSA is using the annual review process to monitor Pre-ETS spending and whether states are meeting the 15 percent spending requirement. Mr. Trapp said the state showed a precipitous drop in Pre-ETS spending for 2020, going from spending 14.7 percent of the grant on Pre-ETS to spending 2.7 percent on Pre-ETS. He said much of this apparent decline in Pre-ETS spending was due to a DVR reporting error. He said this report period was also during the pandemic, a time when it was virtually impossible to spend the entire reserve. He said that RSA asked the Commission and DVR to submit a corrective action plan to address the failure to meet the Pre-ETS spending requirement. Mr. Trapp said that the Commission and DVR sent a response to RSA saying a corrective action plan was not necessary because of the impact of the pandemic, because the revised numbers showed DVR spent more in FFY20 on Pre-eTS than was reported, and because the state almost met the Pre-ETS spending requirement in FFY21. Mr. Trapp said that the state received a response from RSA on Wednesday, and is being required to submit a corrective action plan.

Mr. Romero summarized the letter from RSA, saying it said the state Pre-ETS spending was still only at 2.7 percent for FFY20, and that the state must still submit a response within 45 days. He said the state must also ensure timely and accurate reporting as a part of the corrective action plan.

Mr. Trapp said the Commission’s Pre-ETS spending has increased significantly, which will be a part of the response. He said it helps that the Commission is fully staffed with respect to the VR counselors, and that the Commission is able to operate the STEP program in Alamogordo. He said the agency could not operate STEP in Alamogordo in FFY21 or FFY22 because of the pandemic.

13. New Business

a. Report on Ability to Provide the Full Range of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to all Eligible Individuals, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, and Kevin Romero

Mr. Trapp said by statute the Commission must annually determine whether it needs to implement an order of selection. He said this means the agency must determine whether or not it has sufficient funds and staffing to provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals residing in the state of New Mexico. He said the Commission would normally do this analysis in August or September, but it is being done earlier because of the State Plan process. He said if the agency needed to implement an order of selection, that process would need to be a part of the State Plan.

Mr. Romero said he can confidently state that the Commission has adequate state and federal funding to provide services to consumers. He said that the Commission increased the availability of fund balance from $200,000 to $400,000, as well as having the needed budget adjustment authority to access new federal revenues. He said the agency fiscally can provide all necessary services.

Mr. Salas said the agency has all of the VR counselor positions filled and has all of the assistive technology positions filled. He said the Orientation Center and Skills Center are also able to serve VR consumers. He said the agency served 332 VR consumers in FFY22, which was a slight increase from 329 in the year before. He said the agency does not have a waiting list and is able to serve all of the VR consumers who come to the door.

Mr. Trapp said the agency also has sufficient funding to pay for case services. He said based on the anticipated budget, and staff resources, that the agency can very safely say that it can provide the full range of VR services to all eligible individuals. He concluded by talking about the order of selection, saying Congress intended it to be a tool to ensure that VR agencies could provide appropriate services when there were insufficient resources.

Ms. Bernadine Chavez said that RSA is asking why VR agencies are turning back funds when those agencies have an order of selection.

Mr. Trapp said that last year the VR program turned back a half billion dollars, adding that the VR program was a $3.5 billion program.

Mr. Trapp talked about the Council’s annual report, saying that it contains a description of funding and the services provided. He said it also included the Stevens Amendment language, which is to be included in any report or media that describes VR services or programs. He said he mentioned this requirement at the NCSRC meeting in Bethesda when he talked about the Council report, and that he was surprised that other states did not know about the Stevens Amendment requirement.

Mr. Babb asked if Social Security reimbursements were matchable, and Mr. Trapp said it was a great question, but that Social Security reimbursements were not matchable. Mr. Trapp described program income, saying that it was generated when VR funds and services enable a consumer to go off of Social Security. He said that the feds do not allow Social Security program income to be used as match because it was generated by the spending of federal funds and corresponding state match. He said the agency does leverage program income, and he described that leveraging.

b. Report on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Update and Forecast of Ability to Provide Required Pre-ETS Services, Greg Trapp, Jim Salas, and Kevin Romero

Mr. Trapp said there are nine authorized Pre-ETS services and five required Pre-ETS services. He said the agency can only provide the authorized services if it has provided all five of the required services. He said the agency can also forecast its ability to provide the required services, enabling it to provide the authorized services. He said the authorized Pre-ETS services gives the agency much greater flexibility to provide services and spend the 15 Percent reserve. Mr. Trapp said the Pre-ETS reserve can only be spent on students.

Mr. Romero said the agency has sufficient non-federal match, and that based on the current spending rate the agency would have the fiscal ability to provide all of the required services. He said the agency is estimating that the Pre-ETS Amount for FFY24 will be approximately $879,000. He said that the FFY23 Pre-ETS reserve is $837,344. He said the Pre-ETS expenditures to-date for FFY23 are $474,368, leaving a remaining balance of approximately 362,977.

Mr. Trapp said that the agency is about three-quarters of the way through the federal fiscal year and has only spent a little more than half of the Pre-ETS reserve. He said that in less than two and a half months the agency will also get a new Pre-ETS award.

Mr. Salas said in the 14 through 21 age group there are 70 individuals, with six of those in application status, and three in eligibility status, leaving 59 in service. He said four of the 59 are not students. Mr. Salas said there are currently 57 individuals who qualify as a student, describing the educational status and skills progression of those 57 students. He said 37 students were currently in STEP, with the majority of those in work-based learning. He said the bottom line is that there are 57 individuals in the 14 through 21 age group who are students and receiving Pre-ETS services. He said that Kevin is Projecting $879,000 for FFY24 and that the agency has $362,000 still available in FFY23 Pre-ETS funds. He said that as he mentioned previously, the agency has sufficient staff to serve the agency consumers.

Ms. Mitchell said high school graduates who are in the gap summer can count as students if they have an acceptance letter from a college or other qualifying educational program.

Ms. Burma said that provision of the authorized services can lead to greater provision of the required services. She described the provision of authorized services to teachers who work with students, noting that there was a gap in New Mexico with respect to the needed knowledge in Braille and assistive technology.

Mr. Trapp said he is concerned that students will start to run away in fear every time the Commission shows up to offer Pre-ETS services, which is why he liked the concept of the ACE Academy dealing with careers in music and entertainment as it appealed to students. He said that the idea has some legs nationally and that other states are also using the idea. He said the agency does need to be creative in spending the Pre-ETS reserve.

Mr. Trapp said that in theory, the VR program should be getting more referrals as a result of the provision of Pre-ETS services. He said he thought vocational rehabilitation would be getting more individuals coming out of high school with conditions such as ADHD who might not normally be served by VR. He said Blind agencies only very rarely miss being referred students who are blind.

Mr. Trapp said the agency has had the same 57 number for a couple of years now, and Ms. Mitchell said the agency expanded the services that the Regional Educational Cooperative is providing, reaching out to the 89 school districts in New Mexico to try to find any students who might not be receiving referrals to the Commission.

Mr. Trapp said that the bottom line is that based on the projections of finances, the student count, and the staffing resources, that the agency does project that it can provide all five of the required services to all eligible students in New Mexico in FFY24.

Ms. Chavez said the Commission is doing a good job of providing Pre-ETS, and that agencies across the nation are struggling to spend the Pre-ETS reserve. She emphasized that agencies should not just be giving away the money, but should be actually providing substantive services.

Mr. Trapp said the agency is providing as much of the Pre-ETS as it can using staff time, and that the time is tracked through the use of combo codes. He said that the Agency will definitely be spending more of the Pre-ETS now that it can use the Orientation Center.

Ms. Hayes asked whether attendance at the Orientation Center could count as Pre-ETS services, and Ms. Mitchell said it could if the student has been accepted to a post-secondary program. Ms. Hayes asked about trade school and whether that would count, and Ms. Mitchell said it would.

c. Report on Submission of the Combined State Plan, Process and Timelines, Jim Salas

Mr. Salas reported on the Combined State Plan, said the agency was in the process of developing the state plan, and that the Department of Workforce Solutions was the lead agency. He said that John Casado was the contact at DWS, and that he sent out a guidance saying that the initial deadline for agencies to get their portion of the plan to DWS was September 30. Mr. Salas said the public comment period was November 1 to November 30. He said the State Plan will be considering the State Plan on December 7. Mr. Salas said the Commission would have public meetings on the Commission’s portion of the State Plan. He said the Statewide Needs Assessment was another important part of the process.

Mr. Trapp said this was a very tight timeline, and that the agency needed to schedule public meetings, Statewide Needs Assessment and work with the council on the Goals and Priorities. Ms. Burma said the Commission has already started working on the State Plan, and Mr. Trapp said the agency has already had three public meetings on the state Plan.

D. Approval of Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment, Greg Trapp

Mr. Trapp said the agency and SRC jointly develop and conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. He said the draft was sent out on Monday. He said that the assessment is intended to inform the Council in the development of the Goals and Priorities, and that it would also be an important tool should the agency have an order of selection.

Mr. Trapp said the agency has used the same basic Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment for several State Plan cycles. He said the process includes the conducting of public meetings, stakeholder meetings, assessment of demographic data, focused discussions, and now consideration of the impact of the pandemic. Mr. Trapp asked Mr. Romero to read the Comprehensive Statewide Needs assessment, which he did, and which is attached to these minutes.

Ms. Chavez suggested that the Client Assistance Program and 121 Projects be listed in the key stakeholder list, and that transition be included in the demographic data, and Mr. Trapp agreed.

Mr. Luttrell moved to approve the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, adding the client Assistance Program, 121 Projects, and workforce boards, and adding transition to the demographic data. Mr. Babb seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously approved.

e. Review of demographic, labor, and medical data, Greg Trapp

Mr. Trapp said he had flooded the inboxes with materials regarding demographic data. He reviewed the items he sent, including a Journal article written by Dan McKay about a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. He said the report found that New Mexico ranked 50th in their annual Kids Count. He said that while the state ranked last, it was improving. He said New Mexico has ranked 49th or 50th every year since 2012. He said the positives included that the state had expanded the childcare assistance program in 2021, and that voters last year authorized increases in the funding available for early childhood education. He said the share of children living in high-poverty areas fell from 22% to 19%. He said the percent of Fourth graders not proficient at reading grew from 76% to 79% and the percent of eighth graders not proficient in math went from 79% to 87%. He said the percentage of children in single-parent families was 44 percent, which was unchanged between 2019 and 2021.

Mr. Trapp summarized a study published online April 6 in JAMA Ophthalmology about Poor social determinants of health being tied to vision loss. He said SDOH was examined across domains consisting of economic stability; educational attainment; health care access and quality; neighborhood and built environment; and social context. He said these were significant predictors of poor vision.

He said that higher income was also associated with lower odds of vision loss.

Mr. Trapp reported on a study published online July 5 in Pediatrics, saying that the childhood obesity rate in the U.S. was Higher now than 12 years prior. He said comparing 2010 versus 1998, childhood obesity was worse for children from the most socioeconomically disadvantaged households.

Mr. Trapp reported on data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Vision and Eye Health Surveillance System from 2021, saying that 26% of those with diabetes had diabetes-related eye disease and almost one in five had diabetic retinopathy.

He said that 1 in 4 Americans aged 40 and older have eye disease due to diabetes, which was more than double the levels from 2004. He said that for persons 24 and under, more than 1 in 10 persons with diabetes had diabetic retinopathy. He said for those 25 to 39, nearly 1 in 5 had diabetic retinopathy.

Mr. Trapp said a report in meta-analysis published online March 17 in JAMA Network Open, showed that the rate of diabetic retinopathy is 6.99 percent in patients with pediatric type 2 diabetes, and the rate of diabetic retinopathy increases with the length of time that the individual has diabetes. He said time is the biggest factor for diabetic retinopathy.

Mr. Trapp summarized a study published February 14 in the journal JAMA Network Open, finding that COVID-19 infection increases the risk of diabetes. He said that the study showed that vaccination prior to infection may provide a protective effect against the risk of diabetes.

Mr. Trapp reported on a study published March 21 in Pediatrics, finding that children with autism were far less likely to have vision screening. He said that 36.5% of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder had completed vision screening, which was substantially less than the 59.5% rate for children without autism.

Mr. Blair noted the importance of considering Social Determinates of Health, and thanked Mr. Trapp for his presentation.

Mr. Trapp asked Ms. Alonzo to review a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the Department of Workforce Solutions. Ms. Alonzo reviewed the slides, describing the slides and saying slide 4 contains the priorities of the administration, slide 7 looks at the very important workforce participation rate, slide 8 looks at unemployment by region, slide 9 looks at employment by industry, slides 10 to 12 look at employment openings, and slides 13 and 14 look at education.

There was discussion of the data, including the workforce participation rate, the very low unemployment rate, the shortage of applicants for high-demand professions, and the specific education programs.

f. Approval of Goals and Priorities, Kelly Burma

Ms. Burma said the Council approved the Goals and Priorities for the Orientation Center when the Council met at the Orientation Center in April. She read through the current Goals and Priorities, and the Council proposed modifications as follows:

There were no changes to Goals and Priorities A, B, C, D, E, F, J,

N, P, and T. Goal and Priority S was dropped.

Mr. Blair recommended Goal and Priority I include charter schools, and Ms. Burma suggested it also include home schools. Mr. Luttrell recommended it also include Private schools. The charter school, home school, and private school language was added to Goal and Priority M.

For Goal and Priority Q, Ms. Burma noted that the Community Outreach Programs for the Deaf had closed and that the language needed to be changed.

Mr. Salas said Goal and Priority R needed to be revised to change the reference to the Hadley School.

Ms. Hayes moved to accept the changes to the Goals and Priorities as discussed, and Mr. Blair seconded the motion. A vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously approved.

g. Approval of Council Comments on State Plan, Jim Salas and Kelly Burma

The Council lost its quorum at this time, so this item was deferred to a future meeting.

h. Designation of State Rehabilitation Council Membership Categories, Greg Trapp

Mr. Trapp suggested that he and Ms. Hayes discuss this item and report at the next meeting.

14. Council Open Discussion

There was no Council discussion.

15. Comments from the Audience

Ms. Marquez asked Mr. Salas about part-time reader positions, and Mr. Salas responded with information about agency reader/ drivers.

16. Date and Location of Next Meeting

The next meetings were set for 9:00 AM in Albuquerque on August 31, 2023, and at 9:00 AM in Albuquerque on September 25, 2023.

17. Adjourn

Ms. Katharine Chavez adjourned the meeting at 3:19 PM.

Approved and Electronically Signed this 31st Day of August, 2023.

Peggy Hayes

Chairperson

State Rehabilitation Council

New Mexico Commission for the Blind

Attachment: Comprehensive Statewide Assessment

Comprehensive Statewide Assessment

The Statewide Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs of Individuals with Disabilities residing within the State and the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs is conducted jointly by the agency and the State Rehabilitation Council every three years. For the 2023 assessment, it will utilize a variety of sources and methodologies for deriving information about:

a. The rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for supported employment;

b. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program;

c. Individuals with disabilities served through components of the statewide workforce investment system other than the vocational rehabilitation program.

ADOPTION OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Pursuant to 34 CFR Section 361.29, the State Rehabilitation Council developed and approved the methodology for the Needs Assessment Survey at a meeting held on July 20, 2023. The methodology adopted consists of the following:

1. Survey of Demographic, Labor, Youth, and Medical Data

A review shall be conducted of available demographic, labor, youth, and medical data, including from the American Community Survey, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other appropriate data sources.

2. Public Meetings and Town Forums

Public meetings shall be conducted in-person and also virtually so as to reach consumers throughout New Mexico, with opportunity provided for submission of oral and written comments. The public meetings shall be advertised in newspapers of general circulation, placed on the agency web page, placed on Newsline for the Blind and on NFB-Newsline, distributed through email lists maintained by consumer organizations, sent to Centers for Independent Living, sent to the Client Assistance Program, sent to the 121 projects, and sent to the State Workforce Boards.

3. Focused Discussions

Focused discussions shall be conducted with key stakeholder organizations, including centers for independent living, consumer organizations, the Client Assistance Program, 121 Projects, and community rehabilitation programs. The Commission shall compile and report the results of the data survey, public meetings and town forums, focused discussions, and the impact of the pandemic to a meeting of the Commission for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council.

4. Impact of the Pandemic

The survey of demographic data, public meetings and town forums, and focused discussions shall include consideration of the impact of the pandemic on current and future needs for vocational rehabilitation services. This shall include a review of the medical and scientific literature as to the potential of an increase in the number of individuals who are blind or visually impaired as a result of the pandemic, the potential impact of secondary disabilities other than blindness that may result from infection with SARS-CoV-2, and the impact of the pandemic on persons who are blind who became unemployed or underemployed as a result of the pandemic.

5. Report to Council

The Commission shall compile and report the results of the data survey, public meetings and town forums, focused discussions, and the impact of the pandemic to a meeting of the Commission for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council.