



Office of Children and Family Services

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

SHEILA J. POOLE
Acting Commissioner

December 16, 2015

Dear Readers:

As we look forward to 2016, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' Commission for the Blind acknowledges its gratitude to the success and support from our valued State Rehabilitation Council.

During Federal Fiscal Year 2015, NYSCB's administration of Vocational Rehabilitation yielded a 4 percent increase in successful outcomes and continuing satisfaction of our key federal Standards and Indicators. Support from our Council was critical to our success in 2015.

Even as we continued to confront an unpredictable fiscal climate this past year, the Council met regularly to advise NYSCB and its thoughtful recommendations inspired us to maintain and approve upon our outstanding service delivery system.

We thank the Council for its steadfast support of NYSCB and we look forward to an even more productive 2016.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian S. Daniels".

Brian S. Daniels
Associate Commissioner
New York State Office of Children & Family Services
Commission for the Blind

December 16, 2015

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
State of New York
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

As Chairperson of the New York State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) from October 2014 through September 2015, I am pleased to present for your consideration the FY2014-15 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Annual Report.

Each year, the SRC produces this report to inform federal and state officials and the public about its work and accomplishments. This report highlights the SRC's activities for FY2014-15 and the goals for FY2015-16.

The SRC works in partnership with all of the key stakeholders responding to the needs of New Yorkers who are blind and/or visually impaired. While the SRC as a whole has a well-defined purpose, our influence does not come merely from legal or regulatory mandates. Instead, our influence comes from the completion of our key work. Each member serves as the voice of the constituencies which he/she represents, and with that voice, each represents the voice of many.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Respectfully submitted,



Pratik Patel

NYSCB SRC Chairperson

cc: Edward Anthony, Deputy Commissioner, Rehabilitation Services Administration

David Miller, State Liaison, Rehabilitation Services Administration

Tracy Breslin, SRC Coordinator/Liaison, NYSCB

December 16, 2015

Mr. Edward Anthony, Deputy Commissioner
Rehabilitation Services Administration
US Department of Education
Mary E. Switzer Building
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Deputy Commissioner Anthony:

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The SRC works in partnership with all of the key stakeholders responding to the needs of New Yorkers who are blind and/or visually impaired. Each member, as does the SRC as a whole, has a well-defined purpose, but our influence does not come merely from legal or regulatory mandates. Our influence comes from the completion of our key work. Each member serves as the voice of the constituencies which he/she represents, and with that voice, each represents the voice of many.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pratik Patel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pratik Patel
NYSCB SRC Chairperson

cc: David Miller, State Liaison, Rehabilitation Services Administration
Tracy Breslin, SRC Coordinator/Liaison, NYSCB

State Rehabilitation Council

to the

**New York State
Commission for the Blind**

**Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2015**

Introduction

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services' New York State Commission for the Blind (NYSCB) is pleased to issue its Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 2015 to Governor Andrew Cuomo and Deputy Commissioner Edward Anthony of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This report includes an overview of the Council's activities during FY 2015 and outlines the SRC's plans for the upcoming year FY 2016.

The State Rehabilitation 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 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 via conference calls which focus on the NYSCB priority areas of workforce development, quality assurance, policy, procedure and planning as well as SRC membership. The SRC holds its meetings once each calendar quarter.

The Council is comprised of members representing consumers who are blind, consumers who are deaf-blind, parents, educators, the Client Assistance Program, Section 121 Native American Rehabilitation Programs, the State Educational Agency, business, industry and labor, consumer advocacy groups, the New York State Workforce Investment Board, and the New York State Independent Living Council. Ex-Officio members represent Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) 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 2015

Listed below are meeting highlights and activities for FY 2015 (including participation in the development of the 2016 State Plan, recommendations, public forums, communication with NYSCB Executive Board, as well as presentations) that the SRC participated in throughout the year.

The fiscal year began with the first quarterly meeting on November 19, 2014. The Chair and Vice Chair welcomed the members back for FY 2015.

Highlights of Significant Activities

As reported in our FY 2014 report, the Council intended to focus on ensuring that it had full representation from a diverse group of members, representing various constituent interests related to people who are blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind throughout New York State. We are pleased to report that, in close collaboration with the Governor's office, The State Rehabilitation Council for NYSCB has more representation than it has in the recent past. The council comprises of 13 members including ex officio members. With the appointment expected to be finalized for two new members by the first meeting of FY 2016, we will be pleased to have 15 members on the Council. During FY 2016, the SRC will be awaiting the appointment of the representative from the American Council of the Blind of New York, representatives of Business Labor, and Industry, as well as replacements for those members whose terms are expected to expire by the end of 2015.

******NYSCB is working under a State Plan assurance for full SRC compliance*****

During FY 2015, the SRC turned its attention to a growing concern that affects employment opportunities for people who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind in New York State. As the state has moved to institute new licensing exams for various professions as well as the high school equivalency exam, more and more of such exams are administered electronically. Through its town hall meetings and community feedback, the council has been following the development of these exams with some concern. In particular, evidence suggests that policies and procedures established by New York State Education Department along with third-party contractors, who develop and administer electronic exams, often leave blind and visually impaired test takers with significant disadvantages. Tests are not fully accessible for those individuals who require assistive technology software. Policies and procedures are insufficient for such well-used accommodations as extended time, trained readers, the ability to use multiple formats of exams, or misnormed exams.

As a result of this evidence, the Council as a whole intends to focus on making electronic high stakes exams and the accompanying environments for exam administration a focus in FY 2016 and beyond. Employing various tactics for achieving its goal, the SRC will collaborate with NYSCB and other state agencies to effect change. This will include possible collaboration with Governor's Executive Advisory Board to NYSCB and the New York State Education Department.

Meeting Highlights, SRC Business:

The NYS SRC under NYSCB 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 Executive Committee. A standard agenda consists of introductions, a report from the Chair, a report from the Associate Commissioner, presentations, public comment, committee meetings and reports, Council business and action items. Following is a brief synopsis of the SRC business for each of the four (4) quarterly meetings for FY 2015.

Meeting Highlights for November 19 and 20, 2014

At the first meeting in November, the council discussed feedback from the two town hall meetings that the SRC and NYSCB conducted in 2014. Among the feedback received was high stakes exam administration, accommodation, and accessibility. The town hall meetings also highlighted particular concerns with trainings provided by assistive technology centers.

In addition, members attending the first quarterly meeting received updates on the pre-college program established by NYSCB as well as a presentation on changes expected due to the newly established Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Meeting Highlights for March 18 and 19, 2015

During the March meeting, the Council reviewed the public feedback received through public teleconferences that the Commission conducted. Even though a State Plan was not required due to WIOA changes, the feedback was nonetheless received and reviewed. Among the feedback received was need for support groups, additional supports and services for adaptive technology, and questions on the eye registry.

The Council worked on one of its significant mandates, the monitoring and pursuing of a consumer satisfaction survey. The initial drafts and strategies for full community inclusion was discussed.

The SRC also received updates on the activities of the Blind Enterprise Program as well as the Reader's Aid program.

Meeting Highlights for June 17 and 18, 2015

As a few new members had joined the Council in FY 2014 and 2015, the SRC found it appropriate to invite a speaker who could provide a presentation on the history and expected activities of the SRC.

The Council received updates on the Equipment Loan Closet as well as information on how assistive technology is granted to consumers.

The Council participated in a presentation and a follow up discussion regarding high stakes testing accessibility. As discussed in the section above, the SRC's focus on testing accessibility comes from discussions taking place throughout the year.

Meeting Highlights for September 16 and 17, 2015

Over the past few years, the Council has been discussing the role of assistive technology training and the lack of consistency and quality standards. At the September meeting, the SRC invited David Andrews, Chief Technology Officer from Minnesota State Services for the Blind, who has been intimately involved in establishing a trainer certification program for assistive technology trainers throughout the state. Discussions after the presentation as well as during follow up, the Council determined to explore an assistive technology trainer certification program for NYSCB.

The SRC spent a significant amount of time at the September meeting discussing the State Plan. Even if a unified plan was not expected until next year, the SRC provided feedback to NYSCB on its draft plan.

SRC made the following recommendations to the State Plan:

Attachment 4.8(b) (2): Coordination with Education Officials

Consultation and technical assistance

Emphasize the need to teach braille and large print during transition if it has not been done.
"Accountability on teaching of assistive technologies."

Attachment 4.10 Comprehensive System of Personnel Development

NYSCB should mandate that counseling staff attend the consumer organizations' conferences as a means of better understanding the consumer's point of view as well as having an opportunity to see and better understand the newest in assistive technology.

NYSCB should provide professional development to staff on working with and meeting the needs of consumers with multiple disabilities with the goal to develop internal capacity and expertise.

Attachment 4.11(d)

Goal 1 --# 6 include fostering working relationships with DOL and ACCES VR

#8- Develop and implement plans to increase training opportunities and middle skills jobs in coordination with ACCES VR-

Goal 2- Strategy #4 should include ACCES VR and Department of Labor as well as local chamber of Commerce as partners.

In the reference to ATC contractors: a provision for continued required training of the contractors on AT and new devices should be added.

Goal 3 #7: Provide targeted outreach and education about NYSCB services to eye care, healthcare and other related service providers and raise awareness at respective statewide conferences.

Solicit and compile success stories from consumers to promote utilization of services.

Assistive Technology discussion:

To address the needs of individuals with multiple disabilities (fine motor, mental health, processing and other cognitive disabilities), the SRC recommends the use of a multidisciplinary team approach including consultation with service providers specializing in the area of need. This would offer an opportunity to build the internal capacity of the NYSCB providers regarding other disability needs and strategies for success.

Serving youth: - explore options to involve families identifying needs, in the evaluation process and identifying needs for follow-up supports at home -develop some form of "how to" for those supporting youth at home, school and in the community. (Addresses the collaboration with schools issue as parent)

Attachment 4.11(d) State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

Goal 2: add number (12) "Work with the private agencies to develop Work Incentives Improvement Act (WIIA) ticket to work programs further enhancing and increasing the partnership plus programs throughout the state."

Goal 4: add number (4) "Invest in the creation of a subsection of outreach within each regional office responsible for promoting the NYSCB to community employers."

In Goal (4) add number (5) "Invest in the provision of qualified SSPs to deaf-blind jobseekers throughout the state."

Attachment 4.11(e) (2): Evaluation and Report of Progress in Achieving Identified Goals and Priorities and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion

Goal 1: Use other than fiscal 2012 as the baseline for 2016 for comparison purposes.

Goal 4: Improve services to individuals who are deaf-blind

Add: "Closely coordinate with the current provider of the state-wide deaf-blind equipment distribution program established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) through its authority given under the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) in order to ensure that deaf-blind consumers are provided all necessary equipment and training."

(Note that this program ensures that Commission utilizes all community resources to take advantage of external funds.)

Identify how a broad range of assistive technology services and assistive technology devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process; and describe how assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities on a statewide basis.

Add: "investigate the creation of a state-wide assistive technology trainer certification program in order to harmonize technology skills throughout all assistive technology trainers in New York State. Collaborate with states such as Minnesota and Texas that have placed such programs into effect."

Presentations by Associate Commissioner Brian S. Daniels:

The following reports were provided by Associate Commissioner Daniels during the SRC meetings:

November 2014

- Commissioner Daniels reported on significant staff changes at the Commission including the retirement of Janice O'Connor, Mary Ann vanAlstyne, and the pending retirement of other staff expected over the next five years. Plans for replacements were discussed including the obtaining of waivers for hiring needed replacements.
- He emphasized the need for continued collaboration with The American Council of the Blind of New York and the National Federation of the Blind of New York—especially in light of the fact that these two organizations provide important information for the Commission to hold town hall meetings.
- He reported on NYSCB's efforts to make various high stakes tests accessible including Marriage and Family Therapy tests. He promised to keep the SRC involved in additional efforts.

March 2015

- Commissioner Daniels updated the Council on staff vacancies and plans for replacements. In addition, he discussed changes at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) that might impact NYSCB.

- He reported that a state-wide movement to include accessibility language in NYS contracts to purchase and develop software and technology is being pursued.
- He further reported that he was selected as a representative on the Employment First Commission, which was put together to return recommendations for increasing employment among people with disabilities.

June 2015

- Commissioner Daniels reported on new open positions at the NYSCB and existing waivers for at least 8 positions. He further reported plans for filling positions for pending retirements in upcoming months.
- The Commissioner discussed the recommendations of the Employment First Commission and that NYSCB would be directly involved in carrying out many provisions of the recommendations.
- He further reported that NYSCB was fostering a new management culture within the agency to apply a "lean management" philosophy. This would allow managers and staff at the Commission to be agile and nimble in doing their work while learning from their mistakes and minimize resource utilization.

September 2015

- Commissioner Daniels discussed recent developments with the Ability One Commission and news in the press regarding Source America, one of the programs that the Ability One Commission Oversees. He reported the development of seven principles for operating such programs by a newly developed coalition of organizations.
- The Commissioner reported on NYSCB's staffing levels. On the date of the meeting, the Commission stood at 130. New waivers and positions were pending. The Commissioner reported on new appointments to vacancies he previously discussed with the SRC.
- He reported that an accessible version of the high school equivalency exam by McGraw Hill would not be available as anticipated in January 2016.

Planned Goals and Activities for FY 2016

The SRC is scheduled to meet quarterly in FY 2016. In addition, the Executive Committee and each of the four standing Committees will meet via conference call throughout the year.

The four standing committees will be: Membership, Policy, Procedure and Planning, Quality Assurance, and Workforce Development. The new Chair will appoint the chairs and members of each committee and will give each its charge.

Goals for FY 2016

Below are several goals the SRC plans to work on during the next year in addition to its mandated requirements. In addition to the general goals listed above, these goals will be addressed by individual committees.

Membership Committee

- Goal 1: Continue to recruit qualified, diverse candidates to fill new positions or vacancies on the State Rehabilitation Council.

Quality Assurance Committee

- Goal 2: Evaluate results of the consumer satisfaction survey and generate recommendations based on its results.
- Goal 3: Assist in the development of a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of NYSCB's outreach efforts to healthcare professionals and pre-service students.
- Goal 4: Collaborate with the Policy, Procedures, and Planning Committee and NYSCB in the development of the AT trainer certification program.

Policy, Procedures, and Planning Committee

- Goal 5: Continue to work closely with NYSCB on its new AT policy to ensure that AT standards and confidentiality procedures are established.
- Goal 6: Closely collaborate with NYSCB to include language in all future state contracts pertaining to full accessibility of high stakes testing and instructional material.
- Goal 7: Collaborate with NYSCB and the Quality Assurance Committee to identify, evaluate, and make recommendations based on models of AT trainer certifications throughout the country.

Workforce Development Committee

- Goal 8: Closely work with NYSCB to develop a plan for individuals impacted by sheltered workshop closures to be sure they are presented appropriate work opportunities.
- Goal 9: Develop workforce opportunities by creating and maintaining relationships throughout NYSCB district offices and agencies for the blind in New York State.
- Goal 10: Develop a three-year plan for increasing workforce opportunities (including improvement of interagency collaboration among Department of Labor, NYSCB, and ACCES-VR as well as plan for disseminating information regarding NYSCB).

Other Planned Activities in FY 2016

The Council will participate with NYSCB in developing the State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year 17. The participation will include information gathering from its members' respective constituencies. The 2017 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 re-examine its current by-laws to determine whether any amendments or restructuring may be needed.

The SRC will continue the orientation and new member training in the future at one of the quarterly meetings based on the timeliness of appointment each Fiscal Year hereafter.

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. Further, the SRC will work with NYSCB to develop one or more mentoring programs, as well as other mechanisms to bring New Yorkers who are blind together so that they may learn from and support each other.

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 or have low vision.