



Office of Children and Family Services

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

SHEILA J. POOLE
Acting Commissioner

December 16, 2016

Dear Readers:

As we look forward to 2017, 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 2016, NYSCB's administration of Vocational Rehabilitation yielded a nearly 3 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 2016.

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 2017 as we continue to fulfill the obligations of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian S. Daniels".

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

December 15, 2016

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), I am pleased to present for your consideration the FY2015-16 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 FY2015-16 and the goals for FY2016-17.

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,



Theresa Drum
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 15, 2016

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,



Theresa Drum
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 2015/2016**

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 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 and plans for the upcoming FY 2017.

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), the 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 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 2015/2016

Listed below are meeting highlights and activities for 2015/2016 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. Following is a brief synopsis of the SRC business for FY 2015/2016.

MEETING ONE: November 18 & 19, 2015

The fiscal year began with the first quarterly meeting in November. Chair Pratik Patel and Vice Chair Chancey Fleet welcomed the members back for the new fiscal year 2016.

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

The SRC is kept well informed of NYSCB and its reporting processes to the State and RSA by the NYSCB Associate Commissioner, Brian Daniels. In his report, the Associate Commissioner informed the Council that NYSCB passed all of its Standards and Indicators. In 2015, NYSCB's individual placements increased by four percent. Mr. Daniels provided a brief update on the Office of Community Living, updated the SRC about changes in NYSCB staffing and addressed the continuing concerns regarding assistive technology and access to training. An agenda item was added to the March meeting to discuss a "plan of action for technology" with the SRC.

Other Presentations/Activities

- Albert J. Rizzi, Founder and CEO of My Blind Spot and Accessibility, shared information about his organization and how it came to fruition.
- Laurie Munro, Associate Vocational Counselor NYSCB, provided an overview of Transition Services and described many of the opportunities offered for youth who are legally blind to learn how to live independently, obtain meaningful prevocational training, gain work experience and develop career plans.
- Karen Gourgey, Chair of the Executive Board gave a brief overview of the Board and issues they focused on such as Teachers for the Visually Impaired certification requirements.
- Arun Karpur of the Research Director NYS Promise & Research Facility and Julie Venneman, a NYSCB VR Counselor, provided updates on Cornell Consumer Satisfaction Survey results.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: Erica Molina reported that the Quality Assurance Committee in conjunction with the Policy Committee will be working on issues related to Assistive Technology. Preliminary feedback from the consumer satisfaction surveys was shared. The Council suggested that NYSCB start reviewing new contracts as opposed to continuing with old contract reviews.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: Chancy Fleet reported that draft recommendations were reviewed regarding the provision of mobile devices by NYSCB. The committee requested clarification on several issues including a professional's ability to make recommendations and best practices for communications for AT trainers while working with consumers.
- Workforce Development: The Committee recommended sharing information about the qualification of the SRC's networks and NYSCB counselors for the 55-a program. A "lunch and learn" outreach strategy to inform Human Resources offices and One Stops about NYSCB services with employers was suggested.
- Transition Committee: The Council discussed and voted in favor of creating a Transition Committee to support transition services to ensure educational supports are in place for students who are legally blind/blind and promote collaboration.

Public Comments

Elizabeth Hassett Schmidt, M.S., Admissions Coordinator at the National Statler Center for Careers in Hospitality Services, provided public comment about her agency's services.

MEETING TWO: March 16 and 17, 2016

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

Brian Daniels welcomed new members, Meghan Schoeffling and Debbie Fiderer, and invited guests from ACCES-VR who were observing the meeting. Information about NYSCB staffing changes was shared. Updates included the status of the shared State Plan at the Governor's Office, the timeframe for the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regulations, the upcoming press release regarding the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the Indicators report. The Consumer Satisfaction Survey showed an 87% positive feedback with only 13% of areas for improvement. The Indicators report showed that NYSCB is maintaining and exceeding the 2014 RSA Standards.

Mr. Daniels informed the Council that NYSCB is not recommended to be a part of the Office of Community Living. Other updates included information about the inaccessibility of the high school equivalency exam, TASC. A small workgroup in the process of being formed in regard to serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) consumers. He also announced that the NYSCB open forums will be held in October. The formation of an AT advisory task force was introduced to address issue related to technology such as the TASC exams, technology procurement, accessibility and service delivery.

Other Presentations/Activities

- Andres Harnecker, Business Service Specialist 1 from the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), provided an extensive update to the SRC.
- Brian Suedkamp, NYS Department of Labor, provided information about tax credits for employers who hire people with disabilities.
- Nathan Beyer, Chief of Fiscal and Program Support at NYSCB, provided information about fiscal planning, human resources, IT and Audit protection.
- Mindy Jacobson, Executive Board, reported on working with NYS Office for the Aging to raise awareness of the number of senior citizens who are blind and in need of funding. Cross training, webinars and conference calls were proposed.
- Joint ACCES-VR & NYSCB SRC Meeting: Chair Patel reported that efforts are being made to understand the operations and share ideas from each SRC. The Chair and Vice Chair are scheduled to attend ACCES-VR's June meeting.
- National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Council (NCSRC): The SRC voted to join this coalition.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: The Committee shared interest in having NYSCB obtain exit interviews and asked to review the blank forms that are used when NYSCB Senior VRC's complete reviews of VRCs.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: The Committee worked with NYSCB on the mobile device policy and discussed the possibility of future collaboration with Assistive Technology Centers.
- Workforce Development: The Committee discussed the continuing changes with WIOA, ongoing interactions with One Stops and working with the NYC Metro Placement Consortium.

- Transition Committee: The Committee discussed the importance of Orientation and Mobility training as a part of transition planning.

Public Comments

None

MEETING THREE: June 22 and 23, 2016

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

Brian Daniels reported on the expected growth of the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), work toward the development of a strategic plan for the NYS Preferred Source Program (NYSPSP) for People Who are Blind, consumer intake process through LEAN (Six Sigma) and updates on NYSCB staff changes. Mr. Daniels announced the American Council of the Blind (ACB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) will hold the NYSCB Town Meetings in October. Mr. Daniels reported that Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) is an OCFS wide initiative. NYSCB has created a survey for contract & placement agencies. Mr. Daniels also shared his commitment to address issues related to assistive technology and discussed the establishment of a taskforce to address such topics as the TASC exam, 508 compliance and the delivery of equipment to consumers in a facilitated fashion and the general statewide IT infrastructure that affects accessibility to statewide resources as they pertain to employment and other opportunities. The SRC voted unanimously to create the Assistive Technology (AT) Committee.

Other Presentations/Activities

- John Triller and Chris Pinheiro, Workforce Manager NYSDOL, provided information about WIOA Title I and Title III.
- WIOA and Combined State Plan update: Associate VRCs Sharon Flom and Peter Herrig provided information on the status of the combined State Plan. The WIOA implementation timeline will be developed by the core partners to track goals and objectives of the agencies involved in its execution. NYSCB's WIOA team meets on a bi-weekly basis to focus on implementation of WIOA.

Committee Work

- Quality Assurance: The Committee requested information regarding the use of other languages in the provision of NYSCB services as well as information on the availability of self-advocacy training for NYSCB consumers.
- Policy, Planning and Procedures: The Committee discussed the accessibility and dissemination of NYSCB information. Topics included resources in languages other than English and the best mode of communication.
- Workforce Development: The Committee's goal is to get a better idea of the Career Center system and how they are working with job seekers who are blind, as it seems there is an inconsistency with Career Center staff about the accessibility and understanding of their role with job seekers who are blind.
- Transition Committee: The Committee's goal is to ensure students who are blind are receiving meaningful transition services in school. Future work will include partnering with ACCES-VR's transition committee to ensure such quality services.

Public Comments

None

MEETING FOUR: September 21 and 22, 2016

Presentation by the Associate Commissioner

Brian Daniels provided details on the two open forums to be held in October and requested SRC member attendance. The Council also recommended, and NYSCB agreed, that a third open forum be organized for early November in the NYC area. Further information was shared regarding the LGBTQ survey distribution and provided updates to the SRC regarding NYSCB's new staff and promotions. In-depth information was shared with follow up discussion in response to the SRC's question: What can we do as a Council to help the Business Enterprise Program (BEP)? Discussion included suggestions to advertise the program through YouTube videos, social media, podcasts and utilizing advocacy organizations.

Other Presentations/Activities

- Election of Officers - Nominating Committee: The Chair of the Nominating Committee nominated Theresa Drum for Chair and Chancey Fleet for Vice Chair with no other nominations from the SRC and both were unanimously elected for the 2016-2017 term. Discussion took place regarding creating a Co-Chair position. The by-laws will be reviewed with further discussion at the next meeting.
- WIOA and Combined State Plan update: Associate VRCs Sharon Flom and Peter Herrig provided information on the status of the combined State Plan. NYSCB will be meeting to establish WIOA policies, issues and ideas. It was reported that the homemaker goal is no longer an option for consumers and will be considered independent living. Information was shared regarding subminimum wage requirements, local investment boards, business engagement and youth in transition.

Committee Work

- Assistive Technology: The Committee discussed NYSCB's AT Center contracts, past RFPs and data in terms of success. A list of specific goals will be determined. The SRC voted the AT Committee be redesignated as a Task Force for the upcoming year.
- Quality Assurance & Policy, Planning and Procedures: the committees did not meet to enable member participation in the discussion about assistive technology.
- Workforce Development: The Committee reviewed goals from the previous year's annual report and developed the goals for 2017.
- Transition Committee: The Committee reviewed goals from the previous year's annual report and developed the goals for 2017.

Public Comments

Aaron Baier, a consumer of NYSCB and employee of an Independent Living Center, shared that he is very pleased with the NYSCB services and processes. He shared some assistive technology barriers at the state level, including obtaining textbooks in a timely manner. Brian Daniels expressed that Aaron is an inspiration for the creation of the Assistive Technology Task Force.

Planned Goals and Activities for FY2016/2017:

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

The standing committees are: Membership; Quality Assurance; Policy, Procedure and Planning; Workforce Development and Transition. Chair Drum will appoint the Chairs and members of each committee and will give each its charge. The Assistive Technology Task Force, likewise, will continue its work.

Below are several goals the Council plans to work on during the next year through its committees and task force, in keeping with its 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.

Membership Committee

Goal 3: Continue to recruit qualified, diverse candidates to fill new positions or vacancies on the State Rehabilitation Council. This will include collaboration with the Workforce Development Committee to include participation of the NYS Department of Labor.

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 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.

Workforce Development Committee

Goal 9: In conjunction with the Membership Committee, recruit additional SRC membership from the following constituencies: NYS Department of Labor, State Workforce Investment Board, and business, industry and labor.

Goal 10: Develop and conduct a survey to investigate the current level of utilization of the NYSDOL Workforce Career Centers by blind and visually impaired jobseekers.

Transition Committee

Goal 11: To conduct a survey to gather data to assess the quality of the coordinated set of activities and student participation in transition planning.

Other Planned Activities in FY 2017

The SRC will participate with NYSCB in developing the State Plan for Federal Fiscal Year 2018. The participation will include information gathering from its members' respective constituencies. The 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 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.

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

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.