

# AVIT Minutes – June 9, 2020

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## In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Emily Coleman, Secretary, TSBVI/ AERBVI  
Dr. Rona Pogrund, TTU, TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI), TAER  
Dr. Shannon Darst, SFASU TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI)  
DJ Dean, SFASU, Braille and Cane Club  
Christine Givens, DBMAT  
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind  
Allison Smith, TAPVI  
Matt Daw, Sight Savers America  
Peggy Garrett, TX ACB  
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Juanita Barker, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)  
Laura Hampton, TVI  
Chris Montgomery, TSBVI DB Outreach  
Mari Garza, ESC 2  
Liz Eagan, TVI, Bastrop

*Note: there is an acronym list at the end for help in following these notes!*

### **A. Cyral Miller called the meeting to order at 10:21 a.m.**

### **B. Approval of minutes**

Mari Garza moved to approve minutes and Liz Eagan seconded. The minutes of the March 5, 2020 meeting were approved.

## Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller reported via email that AVIT currently has \$4,234.12 in the bank as of May 20, 2020. There have been zero deposits and zero withdrawals.

## New Business/Announcements

### ***Teacher of Students who are Deafblind (TDB)***

Chris Montgomery reports that we have developed standards for a new position over the past year for a teacher of students who are deafblind (TDB). This teacher certification doesn't currently exist in Texas. We are at the final phase of working with the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) to seek approval. They will vote on July 24<sup>th</sup> on whether to approve the

development of this position. If approved, the State Board of Education will adopt them into state rules. The next step would be writing a test for those that would like the certification.

This certification proposal has just opened for public comment, and we're asking for individuals to support certification for teachers of students who are DeafBlind in Texas. The deadline for public comment is June 29<sup>th</sup>. **To submit public comment to the SBEC on Proposed Revisions to 19 TAC Chapter 235, please use the following link:** <https://form.jotform.com/201465425324146>. Please indicate that you are commenting on the following proposed rule: **DeafBlind Standards, Proposed Revisions to 19 TAC Chapter 235, Classroom Teacher Certification Standards.** (It's the last in the list.)

As more has been learned about this population's unique learning needs, it has become evident that students who are deafblind benefit from access to a specialized teacher with expertise in the combined effects of a visual and an auditory impairment. Several districts across Texas piloted a TDB model with the TSBVI Deafblind Project and ESCs and experienced significant student progress.

A TDB would be a supplementary certification, and available for a person who is already a TVI or TODHH. TTU has been offering coursework that leads to a TX certificate in deafblindness after five courses. TTU also has a Master's in Special Education with an emphasis in deafblind education. The certificate is just coursework; with a state certification option there will be a practicum component, which is two semesters long.

## **C. OTHER NEW BUSINESS:**

Agency/Organization Updates

### ***TWC, Juanita Barker***

Town hall meetings were held virtually since the March meeting. TWC won't be asking for more funding in the updated session, due to the economy. TWC has been teleworking and engaging with consumers over the phone. The agency is using Microsoft TEAMS, which works a lot like Zoom, but with a few more sophisticated options. Many individuals don't have hardware or internet, but they continue to try training virtually. They also have set up virtual support groups. Reminder: Transition services start at age 14. The average age for referral is 18, and that is too late; it should be done sooner. Referrals have been down since COVID-19.

White Cane Day will be in Austin on October 14, virtually via Facebook, and Juanita is working with TSBVI to make it happen. TWC is going to host the event, and Mary Faith Cowart is the TSBVI rep. We'll have many speakers including Emily Coleman from TSBVI. T-shirts will be available for anyone in the state. A 4<sup>th</sup> grade student from the Austin area won the T-shirt art contest. We're hoping we can connect statewide events and advertise across all of our organizations. It will be called "Walk Across Texas" and the event is October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. **Anyone interested in helping out please contact Juanita at [juanita.barker@twc.state.tx.us](mailto:juanita.barker@twc.state.tx.us).**

### ***TAPVI, Allison Smith***

Since the lockdown and pandemic, the TAPVI group hasn't been able to get much done. They should be in the middle of elections, but having to restructure due to current times. They did publish their newsletter recently. If you are interested in connecting with TAPVI, or know a parent who might be interested in belonging, please go to <https://www.tapvi.org/> or @TAPVIfamilies for the Twitter feed.

### ***Peggy Garrett, Texas ACB***

ACB will be holding a virtual White Cane Day event on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in partnership with the City of Houston. Texas ACB is advocating for accessible mail voting with REVUP Texas. More information about REVUP is available at <http://www.revuptexas.org/>. The ACB has been active for years in the work to gain independent voting, and now blind people CAN vote independently at polling stations. ACB is continuing to support the Cogswell-Macy Act. The Texas state and ACB national conventions will both be virtual. The national convention is July 3-10 and the state convention is August 27-29.

### ***TSBVI, Emily Coleman & Kate Borg***

Summer programs are well underway within a virtual format. TSBVI has over 160 students signed up. The only program that had to be canceled was the PE class for high school credit. TSBVI was able to pivot into an online instructional environment in mid-March. This provided various challenges depending on families, staff, and remote capabilities. TSBVI successfully held a virtual prom, virtual graduation, Gritto contest, and more. They worked hard to promote community engagement online. TSBVI continues to have referrals rolling in at the usual rate. It has been a struggle with processing everything remotely, but they are working through it.

Multiple teams are planning for the possibility of reopening in August. They are basing decisions on recommendations from the CDC, DSHS, TEA, and local health officials. This has resulted in an extensive list of supplies and PPE to acquire and operational adjustments including reducing the number of students on campus at a time and limiting interactions with each other and with staff when possible. They are looking at class schedules and researching changes that would allow for synchronous classroom and remote learning. At this time, the agency has been asked to reduce their budget by 5%, and Emily was meeting with the Governor's Office to explain the impact that will have on TSBVI programs amidst a pandemic.

Outreach held "Coffee Hour" three times a week from April 6<sup>th</sup> – May 29<sup>th</sup>. They held hour long informal webinars that will be continued next year but are unsure exactly what the schedule will be. Texas Families Together is happening three times a day every Tuesday as a support group for families during this time. Over the six weeks TFT has had 70 participants, and it will continue through the end of July. 3:00 session is topic oriented during the summer. This project has increased collaboration across state lines.

A request was made for the Spring Play, but it isn't available to the public. Copyright was only allowed for the live event. Apologies!

### ***Matt Daw, Sight Savers America***

SSA is hoping to continue to offer clinics across the state and donate equipment like CCTV's. They plan to support 8-10 children this year and are still accepting referrals. They are hoping to do clinics in-person, but uncertainty continues.

### ***AERBVI, Emily Coleman***

The 2020 Conference in St. Louis was postponed until July of 2022. AER is looking at options for putting up virtual content and when they asked whether presenters would be willing to do that, they received over 100 responses! They are also looking at a virtual platform for award recognition, and may tie that into online presentations to increase participation. The Board recently approved a position paper from the Neurological VI Division. Currently the Board is beginning the process to seek a permanent Executive Director, as Mark Richert is serving in an interim capacity.

There was an online opportunity in partnership with DVIDB titled "Home is a powerful place for learning." Parents gave tips for teaching independence at home including some Texas rock-stars like Robbie Caldwell, Heather Withrow, Beth Jones, and Emily Coleman shared as a parent, too. Here are the links for recorded video and the handouts:

Home is a Powerful Place for Learning webinar:

<https://youtu.be/CizJVeJ42GA>

[Click here for powerpoints and handouts](#) for Home is a Powerful Place for Learning.

### ***TAER, Rona Pogrund, President***

The TAER Conference in San Marcos for April was cancelled due to COVID-19. Elections were held via emailed ballots. Rona Pogrund is the new President and Belinda Rudinger is the President-Elect. Yvonne Carson and Tammy Durrett won the members at large. Katie Nash is now the Treasurer. They are still planning the Spring Conference for March 25-27 in Denton, TX.

### ***DBMAT, Christine Givens***

September 25-27<sup>th</sup> will be the family camp in Wimberley, and they are now navigating what that will look like. The DBMAT newsletter was released recently. You can find that and more DBMAT information at <http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>.

### ***DB TSBVI Outreach, Chris Montgomery***

There is TEA grant money (currently \$10,000 a year - ESC 11 may request an increase for the future) for individuals participating in the 5 courses of DB college coursework that leads to a DB certificate. If formal TDB certification is approved, TTU will add a practicum course.

Questions about applications for this tuition assistance can be directed to Hillary Keys <hkeys@esc11.net>.

**TUPVI - TTU and SFASU, Rona Pogrund & Shannon Darst**

Dr. Pogrund shared at TTU, they are pretty used to an online environment. They had a large number of applicants for summer, and took 14 new students through the Reach Across Texas Program. There are 20 people in her braille course this summer. The university banned all face-to-face classes and components of classes. TTU currently plans to return to face-to-face in the fall. Completion dates are being delayed due to O&M courses not being possible without in-person options. Project INVITE Cohort #1 has begun this summer.

Dr. Darst said SFASU gave special permission for cane classes and internships if possible this summer. They have placed 8/20 internship slots, which is good given the pandemic. The remaining internships will be bumped to the future. Faculty has gone from 6 to 4, and will be down to 3 by August. Jennifer Perry is moving to Ohio and Cricket is retiring in August after many years of service. SFASU is on a hiring freeze due to COVID-19. They have about 20 new TSVIs and 10 new O&Ms on their grant. They've had many applicants. All classes other than cane classes are the same, nothing has changed. Lesson delivery has been creative.

**East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Ann Phillips**

Ann shared there will also be a White Cane Day event at the Lighthouse, which will be Friday, October 26<sup>th</sup>. Production has been continuing with greater orders than normal, which has been true for most or all Lighthouses. Client services in person stopped mid-March and returned face-to-face June 1<sup>st</sup>. They have been serving clients virtually in-between.

**E. FUTURE MEETING DATES:**

The next meeting date is Tuesday, September 1st. AVIT meetings are from 10-12.

Emily Coleman motioned to adjourn the meeting and Rona Pogrund seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.*

## **F. Acronyms!**

There are a lot of shortcut acronyms used in these notes. Here's a handy cheat sheet:

AVIT - Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans

BCVDDP - Blind children's vocational discovery and development program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC

CILS - Center for Independent Living Services

DB - DeafBlind

ESC - Education Service Center

HHSC - Health and Human Services Commission

HR - human resources (personnel)

IL - independent living programs

IT - information technology (technology services)

NFADB – National Family Association for Deaf-Blind

OIB - Older Individuals who are Blind

O&M – orientation and mobility

RCT – Rehabilitation Council of Texas

SFA or SFASU – Stephen F. Austin State University

SSP - Support Service Provider

TEA - Texas Education Agency

TSBVI - Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

TTU – Texas Tech University

TUPVI – Texas University Professors in Visual Impairment

TWC - Texas Workforce Commission

TWS - Texas Workforce Solutions

VR - vocational rehabilitation

WIOA - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the legislation that governs much of the vocational rehabilitation moneys from the Federal government