

# DRAFT AVIT Minutes– March 5, 2020

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## In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Emily Coleman, Secretary, TSBVI/ AERBVI  
Dr. Rona Pogrud, TTU, TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI), TAER  
Dr. Shannon Darst, SFASU TX University Professors in Visual Impairment (TUPVI)  
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach, Central TX Professionals for VI  
Neva Fairchild, American Foundation for the Blind, AERBVI  
Susie Welsh, DBMAT  
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind  
Juanita Barker, TWC  
DJ Dean, SFASU

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

### **A. Cyral Miller called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.**

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

Neva Fairchild moved to approve minutes and Kate Borg seconded. The minutes of the December 12, 2019 meeting were approved unanimously.

## Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller reported via email that AVIT currently has \$4,234.12 in the bank as of February 27, 2020. There have been no deposits or withdrawals.

## New Business/Announcements

### ***Kate Borg, TSBVI***

Information from Mari Hubig at The Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) Education Resource Center on Deafness alerted Kate Borg that House Bill 2255 in the last session requires sharing information with TSD about infants and toddlers who do not pass the hearing screening in a follow - up screening (with parent permission). TSD is a designated statewide resource center per TEC 30.051(b). The family of the newborn or infant is also referred both to the ECI program and to TSD's resource center and given additional resource information.

There is not a similar requirement for infant vision screening, so the question discussed was if it would be feasible and beneficial to set up a similar system to share information with TSBVI, given the current significant undercount and late identification of infants and toddlers with

visual impairment. TSBVI has a similar legislative mandate to provide statewide service, including technical assistance, in the field of visual impairment and is the organization that collects the statewide annual VI student registration. There isn't a direct vision testing parallel to the mandate for a newborn infant hearing screening: Emily Coleman noted that the first time vision is reliably assessed is typically at the fourth month well-child check-up, unless there is an obvious condition. Currently, Texas law states that upon enrollment in ECI, infants with suspected or diagnosed visual impairment must be referred to their local districts for birth-3 VI services yet there is evidence that this linkage is not always timely across the state. Ann Phillips noted that the national [infantsee.org](http://infantsee.org) program provides no-cost eye exams for infants up to one year, and may be a good partner organization to help increase early identification of infants. We didn't know whether other states might have a system for a single point of contact for children identified as having a visual impairment that Texas could modify to meet our needs. Kate Borg is going to research and come back to the group with more information and possible suggestions for how to proceed with a "single point of entry" for students identified as B/VI.

## **C. Updates**

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

TWC is currently hosting town hall meetings across Texas focusing on hearing about challenges of Texans with disabilities seeking employment. Sessions will be in

- Austin on March 5<sup>th</sup>,
- Dallas on April 2<sup>nd</sup>,
- San Antonio on April 23<sup>rd</sup>,
- Houston on May 14<sup>th</sup>,
- McAllen on March 26<sup>th</sup>,
- Amarillo on April 16<sup>th</sup>,
- Nacogdoches on April 30, and
- Odessa in May.

There will be a virtual meeting on May 19<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 – 7:00. Juanita Barker shared a handout with additional information that has been shared electronically. Cyral Miller asked if there has been less confusion about finding blindness services since DARS was initially abolished, and Juanita said that the numbers of clients is increasing again, so some are finding services, however TWC is continuing outreach and information efforts. They are reaching out to support groups, doctor offices, etc. to make sure individuals are being identified and referred for blindness-related services.

### ***AFB, Neva Fairchild***

AFB Leadership Conference (AFBLC) is coming up later this month in DC. There will be a Cogswell-Macy Advocacy Day on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Penny Rosenblum is the new director of research at AFB. She's been on board since January and is starting new programs and evaluation research. They are presenting on research in regards to vision loss and older individuals at AFB Leadership; Neva Fairchild shared that there is very little research data available about this population.

AFB is advocating for a change in regulations that would require paratransit providers to allow individuals to have a stop in their trips, and they're seeking research and data that also promote this concept. AFB plans on embarking upon education initiatives starting again this year. Rona Pogrund noted that there will be an educational track at AFBLC.

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

Emily Coleman shared that summer program selection and wait lists have been completed, and family notifications will follow. Since the last meeting, TSBVI hosted the South Central sports association cheerleading, wrestling, and performing arts competition with all six blind schools participating.

TSBVI is beginning work on the legislative appropriations request (LAR) for the next biennium based on initiatives identified within strategic planning. Exceptional items requests may include additional funding to increase base pay for the lowest paid staff, additional funds for safety and security upgrades, website and communication funding, and summer school expansion. There are other items up for consideration, as the LAR is still in the development phase.

Kate Borg reported that Outreach just hosted the Texas Focus conference in Houston, TX. Final registration was about 237 participants. Outreach has received a lot of positive feedback on the event. Upcoming events include "In the Driver's Seat," "Discovering the Future," "City Travel," "Mentor Center," and the "Low Vision Conference." In response to a question, Kate Borg noted that the focus of "Discovering the Future" is on helping families of children who will need ongoing support in their adult lives to imagine and create preferred plans for their child's future. TWC and HHSC representatives often attend and serve as resources.

The 2020 VI registration and DB Count is completed! Texas' count is now at 11,125 students identified as B/VI and 817 identified as deafblind.

### ***AERBVI, Neva Fairchild & Emily Coleman***

Emily Coleman reminded everyone that registration is open for the July 22-26 conference in St. Louis. There were over 200 proposals submitted and the committee is narrowing them down to about 160. Perkins is now offering a 20% discount on some learning opportunities for AER members at [perkinselearning.org](http://perkinselearning.org). Janie Blome is no longer with AER and there is a new interim Executive Director, Mark Richart. AER will seek a permanent ED after the conference this summer.

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

TAER Conference will be held in San Marcos on April 2-4, 2020. The awards have been announced. SFASU's Dr. Shannon Darst is getting the Hatlen award and TSBVI's Adam Graves is getting the professional scholarship award. 221 people have already registered with 14 vendors. The planning committee received more presentations than they had slots, so a poster session is being offered. The conference general focus is assistive technology. Four pre-conference options are being offered, due to enthusiasm in the past for these hands-on formats. This year's keynote speaker is Bruce McClanahan from Washington State.

### ***DBMAT, Susie Welch***

DBMAT bought new software that is also being utilized by NFADB to track membership, newsletter, and eventually camp membership.

DBMAT is accepting applications for scholarships to enroll in the Michigan Intervener coursework in addition to the Utah program.

September 25-27<sup>th</sup> will be the annual family camp in Wimberley.

### ***TUPVI - TTU and SFASU, Rona Pogrud, Shannon Darst, & DJ Dean***

Rona Pogrud reminded the group that TTU has received a new grant called Project INVITE. Eight TSVI's and 7 O&M specialists were accepted into the program from multiple states, with three Texas participants. Orientation will be held April 25<sup>th</sup> in Lubbock with Diane Sheline as the kick-off speaker. Due to limited funding, not all qualified applicants for Reach Across Texas folks could be accepted with stipend support for the spring semester. Some additional people will be accepted in the summer. TTU is reorganizing with their new Dean and the process is just beginning as they're implementing a program called "Ed-Harmony" to get to know other departments better.

Shannon Darst shared that SFASU had 29 applicants for the TVI program and 10 for O&M at SFASU. SFA has a new president and they feel he'll be a wonderful leader. The entire VI/ OM department are now under Education Studies and still serving undergraduates and graduates. Cady "Cricket" is retiring this year, so there will be an opening. The program is renewing their agreements to provide TVI professional preparation with Washington State, Kansas, and Arkansas.

DJ Dean shared that SFA is partnering with service centers across the state for a variety of events. Students are providing new employee orientation training for those who are visually impaired in various locations. Their program received a volunteer service award this year.

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

Ann Phillips shared information about Professional Mastery of Office Technology for Employment (ProMOTE), which is a national program sponsored by National Industries for the Blind. The ProMOTE training program provides advanced training to assistive technology users who are blind or have low vision. It includes two weeks of virtual training and two weeks

of in-person training for blind candidates looking for jobs. The program teaches MS Word, Excel, Outlook and PowerPoint, internet research and creating accessible documents.

## **D. OTHER NEW BUSINESS:**

### **Agency/Organization Updates**

#### ***Cyral Miller, Cogswell-Macy Advocacy***

Cyral Miller shared that anyone can call their legislatures on the next Advocacy Day, which is March 25<sup>th</sup>, to show there is a national movement advocating for education of children who are B/VI. Cyral recommended you call or email on that day, when the DC offices will also be getting personal visits. Lots of information can be found at [cogswellmacyact.org](http://cogswellmacyact.org). She also recommended that you share stories about why this legislation is important to you. Cyral will send out a reminder note to AVIT members to participate on that day. Please make sure to spread the word!

#### ***Texas Education Agency***

TEA has posted the position vacated by the loss of Dr. Vicki DePountis. If you know of interested candidates, below is the link:

<https://capps.taleo.net/careersection/701/jobdetail.ftl?job=00009407&tz=GMT-06%3A00&tzname=America%2FChicago>

Deafblind certification standards have been presented twice at the State Board for Education Certification board meeting. The first vote will be May 1st and the vote on final approval will be July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Once approval is granted, test development will begin.

#### ***HHSC - Karissa Sanchez***

Karissa Sanchez sent the following update via email, as she was unable to attend the meeting in person:

The HHSC Executive Commissioner announced on February 12<sup>th</sup> she accepted an offer to lead the Louisiana Department of Health, which is her home state. Her last day will be March 13, 2020. HHSC Leadership updates will be shared once more information is provided to staff.

Also, many of you know and have worked with Gay Speake throughout the years. She announced her retirement and her last day was February 5<sup>th</sup>. She worked in many roles within the Blind Children's Program for 23 years and ended her career as a Field Manager. We miss her dearly and wish her happiness in her next chapter. Her vacancy will be filled soon and once her successor is selected we will be sure to share with you.

As always if you have any questions please feel free to reach out to me or Lauren Cox, BCP Program Manager [Lauren.Cox@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:Lauren.Cox@hhsc.state.tx.us) anytime.

## E. UPDATES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Neva Fairchild shared that she moved from their house of 37 years to Flowermound, 12 houses away from her daughter. She's excited about the change and has a house big enough for the entire family for gatherings. She's looking forward to entertaining!

There is an overall desire to share perspectives and collaborate as much as possible with all the blindness-related groups and organizations in Texas. Mary Ann Siller has continuously connected with existing and past AVIT members to maintain their involvement. Rona Pogrud asked if we had contacted NFB to join AVIT, and Cyral Miller hadn't done it yet. Cyral will connect with NFB-Texas leadership to see if a non-voting participation might be a way to ensure shared perspectives and greater coordination, yet leave the groups independent.

Rona asked about the new sample "Benefits of Braille" document and Kate shared it has just been translated into Spanish. It has been posted (in English first, and Spanish will come soon) on the TSBVI website at [https://www.tsbvi.edu/attachments/1880\\_Benefits-Braille-English.rtf](https://www.tsbvi.edu/attachments/1880_Benefits-Braille-English.rtf). Cyral reminded the group about the 1991 Braille Bill and the original terminology used to describe students who should receive instruction in braille, which was "functionally blind." Given the evolution of that term, AVIT advocated to remove the term from the TX Education Code. This required an updating of the information about braille provided to parents, as required by Education Code. Stephanie Walker has shared it with all the service centers and has posted it on the ESC 11 Sensory Support Network website at [https://txdhh.matrixlms.com/group\\_announcement/show/48177?announcement=431715](https://txdhh.matrixlms.com/group_announcement/show/48177?announcement=431715). No specific form is legislatively required, but this sample can be utilized to meet the requirement to keep families informed. The new legislation increases attention to the benefit of the learning media assessment to identify braille instruction as appropriate for students who are B/VI.

## F. FUTURE MEETING DATES:

The next meeting date is **June 9th**. AVIT meetings are from **10-12**.

The following future meeting date has been set for **Tuesday, September 1<sup>st</sup>** from 10-12.

Rona Pogrud moved to adjourn the meeting and Shannon Darst seconded.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.*

## **G. 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