

AVIT Meeting Minutes– September 22, 2021

In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI
Emily Coleman, Secretary
Mary Ann Siller, Treasurer
Juanita Barker, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)
Karissa Sanchez, HHSC Blind Children's Program
Kate Borg, TSBVI Outreach, Central TX Professionals for VI
Nicholas Trotter, TEA VI Program Administrator
Susie Welch, DBMAT
Matt Daw, Sight Savers
Ann Phillips, East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind
Belinda Rudinger, SFASU
Beverly Jackson, SFASU
Mari Garza, Retired Professional
Chris Tabb, TSBVI
Carolyn Carman, Envision Dallas
Barbara Knighton, Parent with Family Lynx
Neva Fairchild, AER/ AFB
Peggy Garrett, TX ACB

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

Cyral Miller called the meeting to order on ZOOM at 10:04 a.m.

Approval of minutes

Cyral suggested an edit to the draft June minutes to change Peggy Garrett's affiliation to Texas ACB instead of Texas NFB. Cyral called a vote for approval of minutes with the suggested edit and June 2021 minutes were approved unanimously.

Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller reported one withdrawal of \$130 paid to RAD, Steve Frick, for work on the Word Press website. Our balance is now at \$3986.12. Membership organizations pay \$50 and individuals pay \$10 for dues when requested by AVIT.

New Business

Accessibility to Online Platforms

Cyral brought up discussion about a new law in Illinois that requires online platforms to be accessible for students. HB 26:

<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocNum=26&GAID=16&DocTypeID=HB&SessionID=110&GA=102>

The group discussed whether a similar law was needed in Texas.

Belinda agreed that it was a need, but felt unsure how AVIT could act and if it could be remedied. Cyral explained how AVIT has successfully supported legislative change in the past. Cyral asked for explanation regarding current laws surrounding accessible online materials, wondering whether the problems in Texas are about a lack of legislative mandates or whether there was a lack of enforcement? Belinda shared that there are legal requirements in K-12, but she was unsure about higher education.

Nicholas shared that TEA had received advocacy letters and legal guidance which stated that Section 508 standards of the federal Rehabilitation Act applied to entities receiving federal funding. OSEP said accessibility must be granted, or a comparable alternative.

Belinda shared these guidelines: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>. Neva Fairchild said there is no enforcement for 508 compliance. Belinda also added in the chat, "some of the issues have to do with training and monitoring how systems are used. Canvas, for example, can be accessible if used correctly but can also be used in ways that are NOT accessible—same with other LMSs."

Nicholas shared that an accessibility document was written by a committee including TSBVI employees and TEA is currently reviewing that document. Cyral noted that if laws already exist, and enforcement is the issue, seeking statutory changes wouldn't be effective; the focus would need to be on education and enforcement. Emily added that TEA approved vendors utilizing COVID relief funds that are not all accessible to our students.

Neva mentioned an NFB initiative she learned about in a recent AER meeting. "Blind Students' Rights to Independence, Training, and Education (BRITE) Act" model bill:

<https://stage.nfb.org/sites/stage.nfb.org/files/2020-12/Model%20Blind%20Students%20Rights%20to%20Independence%20Training%20and%20Education%20Act.pdf>. A National Parents of Blind Children post explained that this model bill

is designed to be passed at the state level to "ensure that blind students receive adequate instruction and become proficient in the use of Braille, accessible assistive technology, and orientation and mobility skills. This model bill also requires school districts to offer instruction in these areas outside of school hours." The contact person is Stephanie Flynt at sflynt@nfb.org or by phone at 410-659-9314, extension 2210. Cyral will connect with her to learn more about this effort.

Kate and Belinda said the language of HB 26 (Illinois) looks like it specifies that the local school districts require WCAG level AA compliance (rather than having the entity responsible be the state education department). Neva wondered how many districts will get it right when handled at the local level. Kate shared parent action taken in Utah on the topic of online accessibility. Barbara suggested approaching Governor Abbott to create a committee specific to the education of students who are blind/visually impaired. Kate mentioned current disability entities within the Governor's Office that may be helpful. Barbara felt they weren't specific enough.

Chris mentioned looking for successful models to promote replication throughout the state. Mary Ann mentioned DCMP as a potential resource. Chris feels we still need to educate those in our field about DCMP and Mary Ann agreed. Neva suggested that a Governor's Task Force may get further than a formal committee and often can get pulled together quickly. Neva also mentioned this applies to K-12, college education, and employment.

Cyral asked that others interested in this topic contact her. She will set up a group that will pursue these ideas and learn more about our options. Please contact Cyral at cyralm@gmail.com to be included.

Legislative Issues

Cyral mentioned that we're in the 3rd special session of the 87th session. She asked if there were any issues being considered specific to individuals who are B/VI.

Neva answered that she's on a task force addressing older individuals with disabilities and their access to resources during emergencies including transportation, access to information, etc. She also mentioned that there is [State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry \(STEAR\)](#) that individuals with disabilities can register within to receive assistance during an emergency. The report from this task force is going to the Governor on October 1st. Neva hopes this will bring positive change to those who are blind and visually impaired. Neva will share it with AVIT when it is released to the public so members can support their efforts as needed.

Agency/Organization Updates

TEA, Nicholas Trotter

Stated TEA is in a lull related to the Texas Sensory Support Network. Guidance is coming out in the next month or two related to changes in Chapter 89. ESC 11 is currently revising their draft and then TEA will consider final approval. New O&M modules targeted for administrators are similarly being edited for revisions and content creation through Region 11. And, of course, additional Chapter 89 changes were created in the most recent legislative session, including changes in the regulations regarding specific learning disability and dyslexia. [SSES funds](#), supplemental funds for families to use on special education services impacted by the pandemic, are still available to families of children in special education. Criteria is expanding this fall with additional applications available.

TWC, Juanita Barker

TWC is going to be the first VR agency in the nation to purchase an AIRA license to support their clients and staff. Offices are open; however, onsite staff is limited. Criss Cole has been serving day students and virtual students. They are hoping to begin the residential program in October again. Diane Yoder is the new Director at Criss Cole. TWC is working with HHSC on SB 1917 pertaining to outreach for older individuals who are blind and visually impaired and resource information. TWC served a record number of older individuals who are blind (55 and older) this year; almost 2100.

AER O&M Division, Chris Tabb

[AER Orientation and Mobility Division position papers](#), both revised and new, were recently approved:

- Orientation & Mobility Specialist's Role in Low Vision Driving
 - Orientation and Mobility in Natural Environments
 - Orientation and Mobility Assessments for Students in Education and Life Skills Settings
 - Street Crossing at Streets and Lanes Where There Is No Traffic Control
 - Teaching O&M Through Individual and Group Lessons
- The Remote Instruction position paper is being reworked by a new committee and will likely also be taking input through a Water Cooler discussion.

[SWOMA:](#)

November 4-6

International Orientation and Mobility Online Symposium:
January 26-28, 2022

TAER:

Call for presentations is open until October 31st
Conference is March 31- April 2, 2022

HHSC BCP, Karissa Sanchez (notes provided by BCP)

Farewell from Lauren Cox

BCP Partners,

I am transitioning into a new career path and wanted to personally thank each of you for the wonderful honor to work and partner with you. My tenure as the Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program Manager has been a wonderful experience and I will cherish my work with each of you dearly. It has been a privilege to support children who are blind and visually impaired in their individual journey toward independence for the last 13 years. Partnership in this work has been invaluable.

While the Program Manager position is being filled, the program will be managed by Joanie Cooksey, BCP Program and Policy Development Manager. Joanie has been an integral BCP staff member for the last 3 years and has worked with children with disabilities in both direct service as well as program administration for 25 years. Prior to joining BCP, Joanie led the Texas Autism Program, worked in the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) state office and

delivered direct service in an ECI program in the Dallas area. I am confident BCP is in great hands!

While I may be leaving the program, your partnership with BCP will continue and the program's mission and dedication to children who are blind and visually impaired will not change. BCP staff statewide remain committed to fostering independence and self-sufficiency for children who are blind and visually impaired. If you have any questions about the program, the transition, or would like to schedule a meeting to discuss partnerships with our team, please reach out to Joanie directly at joan.cooksey@hhs.texas.gov.

If you wish to stay connected personally, you can reach me at laurencox533@gmail.com or via [LinkedIn](#).

Wishing you the best,

Lauren

BCP's Futures Planning 101 trainings

The Futures Planning trainings (facilitated by the Arc) are continuing:

The training is being offered virtually and at varied times (such as evenings and weekends) to accommodate our working families and their busy schedules.

They are also offered in English and Spanish.

Training topics: person-centered planning, goal-setting, financial planning, decision-making (including guardianship and alternatives to guardianship) and building community for the future.

C.A.M.P Camp

BCP is planning an in-person spring family camp for our families of children with combined hearing and vision loss. The camp will be held at C.A.M.P. Camp. This could change to virtual depending on the COVID pandemic.

White Cane Day

The BCP, in partnership with Art Spark Texas, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Texas Workforce Commission, and other community groups, created a cross-agency planning committee to honor White Cane Day on October 13, 2021. This event is celebrated annually with local events planned in larger cities around the state (Dallas, Ft. Worth, Tyler, Houston, Corpus Christi).

For more information about White Cane Day, visit the WCD website at <https://whitecaneday.org/>.

Event Details:

Date: October 13, 2021

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Link to event: The event link will be released October 12, 2021. Visit the WCD site to access the event link.

TSBVI, Emily Coleman and Kate Borg

TSBVI has begun Strategic Planning for the next legislative session. Emily facilitated external focus groups, which included about 30 individuals, to gain information about areas of needs for students in Texas. She'll be compiling a report and presentation to share with the Board during a strategic planning session on September 30th. Areas of need that seem to be rising to the top are recruitment and retention of teachers statewide and of multiple positions on our campus, additional funding for teacher prep programs to meet that need and the introduction of the TDB certification. There have also been multiple requests to grow our Outreach program. As we discussed today, accessibility remains an area of concern as does student evaluation and accurate identification.

In related news, TSBVI continues to have difficulty hiring within our residential program. We are working on position reclassifications and restructuring to raise our starting wage. Due to staff shortages, we have placed a temporary hold on admitting new students. We are processing referral paperwork, but a student start date may be delayed due to capacity specific to staffing. We've had to pull employees from the short-term residential program to cover comprehensive programs, which is why short-term is entirely virtual at this time. Due to the negative impact on student programs due to staff shortages, we will continue to seek pay increases for employees in the next legislative session.

Kate shared that increased funding for Outreach Programs is hopefully going to be an exceptional item at the next Legislative Session. Outreach is travelling when requested around the state and requests for consultations are going up. SWOMA and Texas Focus will be virtual this year, which they are hoping will help support attendance to TAER. Texas Focus topics will be centered on data-driven programming.

East Texas Lighthouse for the Blind, Ann Phillips

CEO is retiring at the end of the month and Ann didn't have the name of his replacement yet.

Neva Fairchild, AFB and AER President

Neva is overseeing the Blind Leader's development program at AFB. She is still active in the aging and vision loss national coalition and workgroup through HHSC. AFB will celebrate their 100th anniversary September 23rd. The new Chief Programs Officer is Sylvia Perez from Mississippi State University. AFB is promoting digital inclusion and training specialists within that area. Dr. Kirk Adams just celebrated 5 years with AFB. They hope to offer the AFB Leadership in person in the spring. Neva also mentioned that she continues to be President of AER.

Family Lynx, Barbara Knighton

Barbara explained this is a PTO for TSBVI inclusive of staff, families, and alumni. She talked about their various programs including regular meetings, welcome wagons for new families, creating a campus video, staff appreciation, dorm decorations, campus beautification, testimonial videos, information sharing with families, and social media. Family Lynx had their first official meeting in March 2021. Chris Tabb offered his O&M expertise for training or presentations as needed. Barbara also shared that she is the parent of an 11th grade VI student with multiple disabilities who is in his 3rd year at TSBVI. She has served on multiple PTOs and advisory committees, both local and state.

Texas University Professionals in VI (TUPVI) - TTU and SFASU, Beverly Jackson

SFASU is working on DB coursework and seeking approval for their program. More students are enrolled than last year and they are excited about this growth! TTU staff were unable to join the meeting this month due to a conflicting meeting.

Matt Daw, Sight Savers

Around 55 children were provided low vision equipment and given training via zoom in August and September. Will be expanding into Abilene, Del Rio, San Angelo, and Odessa/Midland to provide 20-40 pieces of equipment to other children. They plan to offer these devices through in-person clinics with locations to be announced later. More funding is expected in the future for the Rio Grande Valley area. In addition, funds are available in the Hill Country and the Houston area. They are open to new foundations in alternative areas. Funding is typically coming from grant writing to foundations.

DBMAT, Susie Welch

The DBMAT family conference is happening Sept 24-26 online. Registration closes on September 23rd. After the conference, they'll be working on legislative issues and the lack of providers related to personnel and funding. One current issue is the provider, "Daybreak," pulling out of one area of Texas. DBMAT's website is <http://www.dbmat-tx.org/>.

Peggy Garrett, TX ACB

The ACB annual convention was held online last month, which worked out well. The program was streamed through ACB radio all over the country. They hope future events will also include CEUs for some of their sessions. Neva and Emily presented at the conference and Peggy thanked them. WCD programming will be available via Zoom. October is medication awareness month and ACB is going to offer a program October 7th to discuss available prescription readers. They will also offer a session regarding open enrollment for Medicaid/Medicare through Zoom.

Mari Garza, Retired Professional

Appreciates opportunity to stay engaged with AVIT and will be discussing today's conversation with her successor.

Dr. Carolyn Carman, Medical Director of Envision Dallas

Envision Dallas will be expanding beyond vision rehabilitation services. Many positions have recently been filled by individuals who are blind or visually impaired. She'll bring a more formal report the next time we meet. She was happy to hear about all the good things happening around the state. Her email is Carolyn.carman@envisionus.com.

Discussion/Announcements

There were no further discussion topics or announcements.

Future Meeting Dates:

The next meeting date is **December 8th** on Zoom. AVIT meetings are from 10-12. Chris Tabb motioned to adjourn the meeting and Emily Coleman seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:39 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Emily Coleman.

A. 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 (or BCP) - Blind Children's Vocational Discovery and Development Program (aka Blind Children's Program), now housed at HHSC

CEC - Council for Exceptional Children

CILS - Center for Independent Living Services

COMS - Certified orientation and mobility specialist

DB - Deafblind

ESC - Education Service Center

FAQ - Frequently Asked Questions

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

STP - Short Term Programs at TSBVI

TDB - Teacher of students who are Deafblind

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