

AVIT Meeting Minutes – December 13, 2022

In attendance:

Cyral Miller, Chair, Central TX Professionals for VI
Emily Coleman, Secretary
Chris Tabb, TAER O&M Division
Mary Ann Siller, Treasurer and North Texas Professionals in VI
Aubri Simpson, TAPVI
Neva Fairchild, AFB
Juanita Barker, TWC and Voc Rehab
Matt Daw, Sight Savers America
Nicholas Trotter, TEA
Mari Garza, Region 20
Suzie Welch, DBMAT

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 10:05 a.m.

Approval of minutes

Cyral called a vote for approval of minutes emailed as corrected this morning. Mary Ann approved and Chris Tabb seconded and the September 2022 minutes were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Mary Ann Siller emailed our Treasurer's report this morning. Our current balance is \$3769.97 with no deposits or withdrawals to report.

New Business

Cyral shared that going into a legislative session we typically have bills we are following. At this time, we know that DBMAT is seeking additional support for the Deaf-Blind with Multiple Disabilities Medicaid Waiver program, but bill numbers are not yet available.

Pat Pound notified Cyral regarding efforts to introduce a bill ensuring service animals are appropriately trained and certified. If a bill is filed based on this initiative, we will vote by email to determine if AVIT will support those efforts.

Agency/ Organization Updates

TEA, Nicholas Trotter

Preparing for the legislative session, there are multiple bills being reviewed by TEA, including the following:

- HB 140, which will set up a system for HHSC to provide qualified support personnel for persons who are deafblind through the use of trained co-navigators
- HB 166 which would establish a procedure to appoint an educational representative for certain students with disabilities.
- HB 133 would prohibit certain restraints for students in special education in public school.
- HB 579 specifies processes for alternative assessments for students who are exempted from the state alternative assessment instrument.
- HB 509 modifies rules related to academic assessment.
- HB 195 pertains to student safety for those with disabilities during disasters.
- HB 62 establishes an Office of Early Childhood to coordinate, consolidate and integrate early childhood programs.

You can look up each of these bills and read the text, see all the actions that have happened and follow progress through the legislative system, at this link:

<https://capitol.texas.gov/Home.aspx>. Remember to specify that you want to see bills from the 88th Legislative Session, 2023 in the Search Legislation box.

The TX Sensory Network is working on coaching around literacy and also developing six short courses on identifying secondary disabilities in addition to B/VI including assessment. These courses won't be completed until mid- to late-2023. Guidance is also in the works for Section 504 plans, with an unknown release date.

Nicholas shared the test is still being created for the Teacher of Students who are Deafblind certification. SBEC reviewed who was eligible for testing in the fall and they've decided to pause until TEA can provide them with more feedback. Stakeholder conversations will be initiated early in 2023. Project launch for TSDB test could potentially be 2024.

Cyral suggested that the DB Symposium could be utilized to gather feedback for the SBEC test. Nicholas shared that Shannah Blankenship will be sliding into the lead role of the TX Sensory Network in January.

TSBVI, Emily Coleman

TSBVI's Holiday Big Show will be this Friday at 9:40am. The event will be livestreamed on the TSBVI.edu website. On Dec 13, Family Lynx hosted their holiday Zoom session at 7:00pm. You can find the link within the "Electrifying News" on our website. TSBVI students travel home on Dec. 21st for the winter break and return on January 9th.

The Curriculum Department has published a new edition of "Making Evaluation Meaningful" which is now posted on the TSBVI website. You can also find Essential Tools of the Trade for students who are Deafblind. The new curriculum site also offers many tools as free downloads.

Registration for the Texas Deafblind Symposium is now open from TSBVI Outreach. It will be held the end of February in Round Rock. STP is offering an algebra class for credit for the first time this year.

TSBVI is getting ready for the start of the legislative session. As mentioned, the primary need is increased salary for classified employees. In addition to that, the School is requesting funds for outreach, teacher prep, safety and security, and an additional stipend for contract staff.

AFB and AER, Neva Fairchild

AFB is still looking for a new CEO and currently operating with an interim. They are conducting final interviews later this week. The Leadership Conference is going to be held in April in Arlington, VA. They continue to focus on research, which can be found on the afb.org website. Many of the reports are about services provided during the pandemic and student results.

Neva continues to work on the Aging Texans Advisory Council. They are working on a website dedicated to older people in Texas with vision loss. Advocacy for increased funding for the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program is also continuing during this upcoming legislative session, spearheaded by Larry Johnson and others.

Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition, part of Vision Serve Alliance, created the **Aging & Vision Loss Big Data Project Reports** which can be found at <https://visionservealliance.org/avlnc/>. You can find the “Large Data Project,” which outlines the incidence of visual impairment in people over age 65 in several states, including Texas, as well as selected demographic information, rate of chronic conditions, quality of life measures and other data. In Texas, 9.7% of people over the age of 65 have some level of vision loss. This covers the spectrum of any level of vision loss. This data is split up by county and you can advocate based on that data. The percentage of older Texans who have visual impairment ranges from 2.0% to 26.8% across TX counties.

Neva shared that research indicates that we’re often using the wrong language when discussing people over 50 years old with vision loss. Data has shown that “older people” or “older person” is a more positive note than “seniors” or “the elderly”. Language matters and when folks identify with the terms being used they may be more willing to reach out for assistance.

Neva mentioned the new AER Executive Director has been on board for six months and everyone is pleased with the work of Lee Sonnenberg. She said AER is thriving under his leadership. They are working to nail down the 2024 International AERBVI conference location. AER is now in solid financial shape and doing well.

TWC, Juanita Barker

They are changing the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) helpline number in early January. This will be handled by a call center to increase customer service and response. The number will be **844-NEED-OIB** or **844-633-3642**.

Juanita thanked TSBVI for hosting White Cane Day – there were almost 1,000 people in attendance. Appreciation to all the stakeholders.

TAPVI, Aubri Simpson

TAPVI is working to build back up post-pandemic. A lot of needs are driven by the pandemic and students have had less progress due to being at home or reduced services. Aubri complimented Neva on the work being done and providing a go-to number for services. They continue to encourage families to attend professional development and workshops.

Aubri asked about leadership training for families and if that's something Outreach is revisiting. Cyral said that she will connect with Kate Borg to ask what is in the works for family leadership training moving forward.

Sight Savers – Matt Daw

Last week, Sight Savers provided clinics in San Antonio and TX Hill Country serving about 36 individuals. In 2023, they will be back in Houston and West Texas (Midland, San Angelo, Abilene) in May. Hoping to offer clinics in Dallas and the Rio Grande Valley as funding is available.

O&M Updates, Chris Tabb

SWOMA happened in early November and was very well attended with 228 professionals, 28 paras and 3 families. There were attendees from all regions in Texas with the exception of Region 16; there were attendees from 16 states beyond Texas. SWOMA 2023 and 2024 are planned to be virtual, with 2025 as the next in person iteration.

AER O&M Division has now posted their newly adopted position papers and revisions to position papers on:

- [Use of Visual Occlusion in Orientation and Mobility Instruction](#)
- [University Personnel Preparation of Orientation and Mobility Specialists](#)
- [The Orientation and Mobility Specialist's Role in Low Vision Driving](#)
- [Teaching Street Crossing at Streets and Lanes Where There Is No Traffic Control](#)
- [Teaching Street Crossing at Signalized Intersections](#)
- [Teaching Orientation and Mobility Through Individual and Group Lessons](#)
- [Remote Instruction for Orientation and Mobility](#)
- [Orientation and Mobility in Natural Environments](#)
- [Orientation and Mobility Assessments for Students in Education and Life Skills Settings](#)
- [Orientation and Mobility Specialist Roles, Responsibilities, and Qualifications](#)
- [Orientation and Mobility Specialists and the Provision of Travel Instruction to Individuals with Nonvisual Disabilities](#)

DBMAT, Susie Welch

Susie didn't get a chance to add her update, but she sent this report: DBMAT is gearing up for the legislative session. We are working on increasing the cap for the DBMD Medicaid Waiver and on adding more slots. We know that there are a lot of individuals out there that are out of school or getting out of school that need services. They're also the young ones coming up. We are also working on having our annual Family Conference in person next September.

HHSC, Karissa Sanchez, sent in via email

AVIT December 13, 2022 Talking Points

Blind Children's Program Update

BCP and DHHS continue to support and participate in the DeafBlind Taskforce meetings. There have been two meetings held this year. BCP is assisting with coordination of meetings and interpreter services. This taskforce is made up of members who are DeafBlind adults or are parents of a child who is DeafBlind. They are the drivers of the meetings and the various agencies, both nonprofit and state agencies participate to collaborate on resolutions to various issues that impact this population.

BCP has hired two new DeafBlind Specialists (DBS) in the last quarter to fill vacant positions. One DBS is bilingual in Spanish and the other is bilingual in ASL, both of which are needs to better serve BCP children and families. BCP continues to have vacancies across the state. Two Blind Children's Specialist positions have been vacant for over a year, one in Amarillo and one in Lubbock. These are posted now until they are filled.

Please share with anyone who may be interested.

HHSC Jobs Center:

<https://jobshportal.hhsc.state.tx.us/ENG/careerportal/default.cfm?>

88th Legislative Session Update

The Health and Human Services Commission agency Legislative Appropriations Request can be found online at: chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.hhs.texas.gov/s

ites/default/files/documents/hhsc-legislative-appropriations-request-2024-2025.pdf

Key dates of interest:

- November 14, 2022 – Prefiling of legislation begins
- January 10, 2023 – 88th Legislative Session begins
- March 10, 2023 – Bill Filing deadline
- May 29, 2023 – Sine Die (end of the Regular Legislative Session)

Health, Developmental and Independence Services Realignment

The agency has been working diligently to realign programs and services around a mission and vision for the populations we serve; creating a structure that brings together expertise and fosters a focus on the continuum of care for these populations. To that end, the Chief Program and Services Office is finalizing an updated program structure. The Family Health Services department will focus on services for women, children and families, and Community Services will focus on programs and services for people with disabilities or special health needs and older adults. These are new sections will replace the current sections within what will be formerly known as Health Developmental and Independence Services.

Family Health Services

Family Health Services groups programs into three areas.

- Health/Medical Services
- Trauma/Crisis Services and Education
- Early Childhood

The Deputy Executive Commissioner for Family Health Services is Rob Ries.

Community Services

Community Services establishes three main areas to develop goals and implement strategic initiatives to achieve better overall outcomes for targeted populations.

- Community Care Services
- Health and Independence
- Local Access and Support
- Places Guardianship Services within the department but separate from a program area as its functions are unique.

The new Deputy Executive Commissioner for Community Services is Haley Turner.

March 2023 Awareness Activities

The Office of Disability Prevention for Children will be hosting webinars throughout the month of March to promote National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM) and planning several educational and public awareness activities. Also, in March is the annual Texas Brain Injury Conference and annual Brain Injury Awareness Month Celebration. The event will recognize Brain Injury Awareness Month, celebrate the achievements of people living with a brain injury, and provide awareness and education on brain injury occurrence and treatment. I will be sure to share the activities schedule when they are available.

Promoting Independence Plan Update

The Texas Health and Human Services Commission submits the Promoting Independence Plan report in compliance with Senate Bill 367, 77th Legislature, Regular Session, 2011, and Executive Order RP-13. For questions or additional information, please contact Mr. Jonathan Connors, Director of Government and Stakeholder Relations by phone at 512-487-3300, or by email at Jonathan.Connors@hhs.texas.gov.

Discussion/Announcements

AVIT hasn't asked for membership dues for several years. Mary Ann is suggesting that we go ahead and ask for dues in 2023 since we haven't collected them in so long and the group agreed. The dues are \$50 per membership group (not associate members). We have 27-28 member groups now. We've used funds for the post office box, to print business cards, print flyers, pay travel costs for people to testify at the Capitol, etc. AVIT will send out invoices/ letters to the membership groups. No vote is needed and we will proceed.

FYI, Matt Kinney volunteers to do braille work (but not UEB); his information is available from Neva.

Future Meeting Dates:

The next meeting date will be **Tuesday, February 14th**. AVIT meetings are from 10-12. The next meetings will be **May 9th**, **August 8th**, and **November 8th** from 10-12.

Chris Tabb motioned to adjourn the meeting and Mary Ann Siller seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 11:16 a.m. by Cyral Miller.

Minutes respectfully submitted by AVIT Secretary, 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

CVI - Cortical Visual Impairment

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

NVI - Neurological visual impairment (often referred to as CVI)

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