

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
Rural Services Ad Hoc Committee Meeting

LOCATION
City Library
Cordova, Alaska

Meeting Date
April 6-8, 2011
Face to Face Meeting

Voting Members: Anna Attla, Belinda Burns, Pam Curns, Tom Cyrus, Mark Doughty, Taylor Greg, Holli Yancey

Community Members: Laurie Cooper, Mary Gregg, Kris Johnston,

Staff: Teresa Holt

Prepared by:
Teresa Holt

Wednesday, April 6, 2011

The group arrived around 9 am in Cordova and drove into town from the airport. We dropped our baggage at the Reluctant Fisherman, picked up the rest of our group and headed over to the school.

Cordova School District

Met with:

- Jim Nygaard-Superintendent
- Keith Zamudio-Technology Director
- Pete Hoepfner-School Board President
- Frank Wicks-Elementary Principal
- Leif Jacobsen- Jr/Sr High School Principal.

After explaining about the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, the district shared with us the exciting technology that they have for the Cordova School District. The district has about 360 students in kindergarten through 12th grade with about 10-12% of these special education students. Cordova has an inclusive preschool.

In 2006, the district received a grant for technology. Now they have computers for all the students and teachers in the district. Jr/Sr high students are allowed to take their computers home with them. The district is currently taking data to see how technology has affected student learning and teacher satisfaction. It is difficult to measure the effect of this technology on learning as all the tools are designed to measure "old world learning-lecture, etc). All the novelty

of having technology is gone and the computers and other technology are just tools for learning. They have not had any issues with theft and students are very responsible with the computers. The district has instilled a culture that while at school technology is for learning not for playing games. The students have become broader learners, using technology to learn. The district feels computer skills are necessary for employment in the future, so these students will be well prepared for their future employment. The district also uses several online tutoring programs which seem to be successful. One thing the school has learned is that districts should take an entire year to train staff to use technology successfully before using it in the classroom

All the teachers in the district also use a wireless infrared microphone system in each classroom. This has improved the ability for all to student to hear the teacher better and for the teachers to not have to strain their voices.

The district uses a wireless system with security measures. They have 2 T1 lines at 3 megabits. Visiting students can use the wireless system if they are given a special access code. Terrestrial internet service (instead of satellite) is coming to Cordova in the near future and this will improve services to the school district's wireless internet capabilities and speed.

Cordova School District uses the services of the Special Education Service Agency (SESA) often. They have an active list of children whose teachers work with SESA staff. They have been a huge benefit to the district and have increased their use of assistive technology. SESA staff is able show staff not only how AT works but how to make it work best for individual students. They are a great resource for teachers and for parents. They would be willing to provide testimony for SESA if needed.

They provide secondary transition services but it is difficult in Cordova due to the seasonal employment opportunities (summer fishing industry) and general lack of year round employment. Adult services providers including Developmental Disability (DD) providers, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) often tell parents to send their children to a more urban community like Anchorage to get services. There are no group homes in Cordova. Often parents have to develop their own opportunities for transition opportunities. There is no DVR counselor in Cordova. The counselor works out of Juneau and travels to Cordova.

Some of the things the district would like the Council to work on include regulations for the use of Video Conferencing (VTC) to provide related services to students in the school setting. Cordova has to use itinerant providers and would like to use VTC to supplement the current on site visits. They have questions regarding supervision requirements of using VTC and licensing requirements. They currently use SERRC to provide their related services which often costs \$1,000 per day plus expenses, so using technology to provide some of these services would be a huge savings for the district. Using technology to provide related services would also give them additional access, consistency, reduce turnover of providers. Sometimes the itinerant providers miss an appointment due to weather, etc, so this might be a way to make up missed appointments. Cordova has added days to itinerant services provider schedules just in case of weather issues. Some related services providers use Skype and the district has been getting offers from all over the nation to provide distance related services.

After lunch, the group visited three classrooms. The first classroom, at Mt. Eccles Elementary School, was Ms Hanson's 1st grade. The students had finished a math lesson and were working on an online math program to practice the skills they had just learned. All the students seemed independent in the use of the computer and were having a great time with the program. The next class we visited, two children who had issues speaking created a podcast on spiders. They presented it to us and to their class for the first time. The result of making the podcast was that these students spoke out in class more often and had a good time practicing speech skills needed to make the podcast.

Then the group travelled over to the Jr/Sr High School to visit Ms. Heitz 7th grade science class. This group was creating PowerPoint presentations to post to their own webpage in response to a 911 call. Each group of students had to evaluate a different system in the body (circulatory, respiratory, nervous, skeletal, etc), create their own response in a PowerPoint, post it to the website, read the other groups PowerPoints and then as a class decide on the best response. All their research for this project was done online or in their textbooks. The group also toured the computer IT and server room at this school. They have an IT person who can help students fix their computers on the spot or get a working one.

Meeting at City Library

The group met at the City Library for the rest of the afternoon. The main discussion centered around whether to host a summit after the American Telemedicine Association conference in Anchorage on September 19-21, 2011. The general idea would be to gather representatives from the Trust Beneficiary Boards to discuss ways to improve services in rural/remote areas of Alaska using technology. The group decided if we could find funding they would like to host a summit on Sept 22-23, 2011. They recommended inviting representatives from: Trust Boards (Chair, ED and two members); Alaska Brain Injury Network; Independent Living Centers; DD provider assoc; MH provider assoc; DVR/TVR; Senior and Disability Services and Infant Learning Programs. There were also suggestions that we invite each member of the Congressional delegations as well as a representative from the ETS state office. They suggested the following presenters:

- Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium -Ferguson
- eHealth-Rebecca
- Online With Libraries-Shane Southwick
- Tele-psychiatry-Ron Adler
- Medicaid-?
- Update of Broadband Access in Alaska-Rich Greenfield/Heather Hudson
- UASC-Bill England (regulation clarification for clinics and schools)

The group also discussed ideas for funding this meeting included asking the Trust for funding, sponsors from GCI, ACS, Plycom/Tanberg.

The group brainstormed some of the barriers to Tele-practice use:

- How to bill for site staff (i.e. person with end user)
- Turnover of site staff/lack of IT knowledge

- Lack of clarification of E-rate use-threat of payback
- Privacy issues for end user
- Access to video teleconferencing equipment when provider and end user are available
- Sun spots/satellite use problems
- Poor bandwidth
- Lack of clarification of whether tele-practice is a billable service under Medicaid, Medicare, insurance
- How to access tele-practice systems for services provided under waivers, grants, other non-medical billable services
- State of Alaska restrictions due to security/HIPPA/FERPA

Thursday, April 7, 2011

The group woke up to a blizzard in Cordova (eventually 24 feet of snow fell in about 24 hours) but we braved the elements to see a tele-psychiatry demonstration at the community health clinic. The group was able to connect live to Alaska Psychiatry Institute in Anchorage and talk with the tele-psychiatry staff there. Then Kris Johnston gave us a tour of the medical clinic which houses services for individuals with developmental disabilities, mental health services, the hospital, the nursing home, the public health clinic and the native health clinic all in one building.

Next the group was treated to lunch with all the agency providers and some school administrators at the local church. Thanks to the Cordova School District for providing the food for lunch. At the providers luncheon we learned that there are no group homes, assisted living homes or independent living homes in Cordova. Either you live in your own home, your family home or the nursing home. Cordova does have behavioral health services, services for people with developmental disabilities and an Infant Learning Provider (ILP) in Cordova. The ILP provider also serves the local native villages and Valdez. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) counselor is itinerant based in Juneau.

It is difficult to get staff to be providers in Cordova due to the low pay and the high pay for seasonal jobs in the fishing industry. Usually the way providers are recruited is that they are friends of the family or the individual with a disability. They work with the individual because they care about the individual they work with. Often it is a second job for the staff person (i.e. they are a teacher but work evenings with a former student because the family cannot find anyone to work as respite). Direct care workers wages do not cover the cost of living in Cordova which is higher than urban communities. The current pay is \$12.15 per hour without benefits but a living wage in Cordova is \$20/hour with benefits. Sound Alternatives is the behavioral health/DD provider agency in Cordova. They are not able to pay for insurance for their employees. Sound Alternatives does pay for all the background check and UAs which ends up as a huge expense due to the high staff turnover.

After lunch the group returned to Mt. Eccles Elementary school and visited Ms Davis' 4th grade and Ms. Galambush and Ms. Roemhildt's 5th grade classroom. We saw technology being used in various ways to teach both group and individual activities. We were supposed to visit some additional classrooms at the Jr high school but the rental van got stuck and we ended up

returning to the hotel to dry off after getting the van unstuck. The group continued our meeting at the hotel as we were unable to travel anywhere in the rental van.

Friday, April 8, 2011

The group met at the library in the morning. The group discussed ways to improve transition services for youth leaving high school. There need to be memorandums of agreement (MOA) at the state and local level between schools, providers of adult services and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) - especially around the issue of information sharing. The group suggested a statewide form for schools to use that allows reciprocal sharing of information between these groups. The group wanted to know if this could be included as part of the monitoring the Department of Education and Early Development does when they look at transition services. The group also felt it was important that transition services begin at age 14 for most students in special education.

The group also discussed a project TCHIC, which is a demonstration project for a medical home model and eMedical records that includes both early intervention and transition to adult services. A request for proposal is currently out but only Dutch Harbor has applied. The Alaska Native Medical Center also uses the NUKA model which is very similar.

The group felt it is important to share the great programs in some communities with the rest of the state through presentations at various conferences such as the DVR/TVR conference in October, the Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference (ASSEC) in February and Full Lives (DD providers) conference in March. The following communities were mentioned as having good transition programs:

- Juneau
- Anchorage
- Sitka
- The Alaska Transitions Outcome Project-Gail Greenhalgh
- Ketchikan
- Deaf Transition team

The group also discussed continuing to monitor and support the Infant Learning Program tele-practice projects. They were especially interested to see how successful the store and forward model is working. They had heard there were some problems using the U-Send It program (used to ensure confidentiality of send items).

Next the group discussed researching ways to fund tele-practice. This included looking into both Medicare and Medicaid regulations at both the state and federal level. The research on regulations should include research into regulations around the various licensing groups such as the speech therapists, occupational/physical therapist, etc. They also wanted to know who is currently billing to tele-practice in Alaska. There was a discussion as to how to find out this information. One suggestion was to survey providers. Another suggestion was to contact Rebecca at eHealth or Renee Gayhart at the Commissioner's Office to see if they know this information.

Another discussion the group had was around how to use tele-practice to improve the way the service system for individuals with developmental disabilities. The group talked about how to use the Online with Libraries project. Some of the ideas included using technology for parent training and when DD Providers hire someone in a remote location (i.e. training for new hires, finger printing, etc.) Nome does a good job of this but YKHC/Bethel does not. Using technology to provide ongoing training for service providers. One suggestion was to survey the providers to see what kind of training they would like to have and about their technology use. Laurie has a quarterly teleconference with providers and could help the group with getting the information out. Other suggestions were to use technology to provide training and consultation for parents/families and for medical or behavioral consultations instead of flying individuals out of their community.

The last discussion the group has was regarding the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Partnership. The group decided not to make this a priority but to have a liaison to that committee. Art Delaney is the Council representative on the FASD Partnership steering committee.

Before leaving for the airport, the group toured the local library, which is located in a single room. They currently have a few computers with internet access for the public as well as several computers not connected to the internet. They do not currently have any video teleconferencing capabilities. They are moving to a new building in two years and might be able to create a private space for video teleconferencing in their new building.

The group offered a special thanks to Kris Johnson for helping us arrange all the meetings and tours in Cordova!!!