**California State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**

**Policy Committee Meeting**

**Thursday, March 14, 2024, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Location: Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Central Office, 721 Capitol Mall, Room 301, Sacramento, CA 95814

*Draft Meeting Minutes*

Note: This committee meeting was held in accordance with California Government Code section 11123.5. There may be members of the public body who participated in meeting who were granted a reasonable accommodation per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Attendance:

* SRC Policy Committee members in attendance (by Zoom): Chanel Brisbane, Ivan Guillen, Theresa Comstock, and Candis Welch.
* SRC Policy Committee members absent: Jonathan Hasak, and La Trena Robinson.
* DOR staff in attendance: Kate Bjerke (present at DOR’s Central Office).
* Members of the public in attendance (by Zoom): Maria Aliferis-Gjerde.

# Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

A quorum was established and Chanel Brisbane, SRC Policy Committee Chair, welcomed attendees to the meeting. Members introduced themselves.

**Item 2: Public Comment**

None.

# Item 3: Approval of the February 2, 2024 SRC Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

It was moved/seconded (Comstock/Guillen) to approve the draft February 2, 2024 SRC Policy Committee meeting minutes as presented (Yes – Comstock, Guillen, Brisbane, Welch), (No – 0), (Abstain – 0), (Absent – Hasak, Robinson).

# Item 4: Fair Hearing and Mediations, Administrative Law Judges

Chanel Brisbane, SRC Policy Committee Chair, shared that during the February 2, 2024 SRC Policy Committee meeting, SRC members asked Lisa Niegel and Cruz Fresquez for follow-up information. The SRC Policy Committee requested links to the regulations that govern the mediation and fair hearing process to inform the SRC’s question about whether or not a consumer has a right to have proceedings held in-person.

The DOR Office of Legal Affairs informed SRC Executive Officer, Kate Bjerke, that they intend to respond to the SRC’s request in writing. Therefore, the discussion regarding item four will be postponed to a later date.

**Item 5: Master Plan on Career Education**

Brisbane explained that to inform the Master Plan on Career Education, the SRC Policy Committee can begin by generating ideas and feedback on the following concepts:

1. Create state and regional coordinating bodies that make it easier to access information, funding, and support.
2. Align K-12, postsecondary, and workforce training opportunities so it is easier to build skills in a variety of settings.
3. Create incentives and improve coordination so that more people can participate in hands-on learning.
4. Make it easier to access public benefits so that learners can afford to participate in education and training.

Bjerke then provided background information. In August 2023, Governor Newsom called for a Master Plan for Career Education. DOR is a named partner in the development of the Master Plan, which will be finalized in fall 2024. The goal of the plan is to increase equitable access to living wage jobs by creating and strengthening education and training pathways that are specific to sectors, regions, and individuals’ skills and experience. These pathways will ensure that all Californians can find opportunities that pay family-sustaining wages. In the final Master Plan, each concept will include specific recommended actions and will be accompanied by proposed changes to statute, reallocation of funding streams, changes in agency responsibilities, and implementation suggestions for education, training, and social service providers. The development of the Master Plan is currently in the information gathering and stakeholder engagement phase. Now through March – mid May 2024, WestEd (contractor) is hosting regional meetings throughout California to gather information on these four concepts. Bjerke suggested that an effective way for the SRC to collectively engage and contribute is to develop written comments, ideas and recommendations and submit them in writing via the Master Plan website, ideally by June 7, 2024.

The SRC Policy Committee began by brainstorming and generating feedback on the following questions: 1) What are the barriers for individuals with disabilities to access career pathways, apprenticeships, college, and high-paying jobs? 2) What would make the biggest difference in terms of removing these barriers? Feedback included the following:

* Benefits planning
	+ The Social Security benefits process is not easy and can be intimidating and fearful for families.
	+ Finding a benefits counselor is not easy and there needs to be an easier way to access benefits planning.
	+ Individuals and families need to be educated to prevent overpayment issues and loss of benefits.
	+ Need to increase access to “warm handoffs” between agencies.
	+ An effective way to reach people could be through community and townhall meetings and listening sessions to explain benefits planning. There is a need to ensure the right audience receives invitations and to increase partnerships with college disability services programs and workforce development centers.
	+ Identify what other agencies and departments can provide maintenance type support and ensure consumers consistently receive this information.
* Stigma
	+ Stigma regarding one’s perception of disability can present barriers.
	+ Who at DOR is doing outreach and education to reduce disability stigma, and what training are the DOR staff receiving? Are DOR counselors comfortable with initiating and handling these types of conversations?
* Community engagement
	+ DOR could get direct feedback from the community on what the barriers are.
	+ Having DOR staff that go into the community is important.
	+ Utilize a community-first approach and increase opportunities for person-centered approaches.
* Collaborations and formal plans
	+ Collaborations between agencies need to be ongoing, memorialized and reviewed annually, similar to local partnership agreements between education agencies and DOR. Formalizing partnerships with specific tasks and monitoring is critical for a successful master plan.
	+ Institute a “no wrong door” policy and increase warm handoffs between departments/agencies.
	+ Where there are already existing committees and collaborations, add career education to the existing groups instead of creating new bodies.
	+ Maximize existing organizations and partnerships and fill in the gaps as needed.
* Student services
	+ Often times, students do not have work experience before getting connected with Best Buddies.
	+ More information is needed on how DOR is providing post-secondary counseling.
	+ It would be helpful to have a greater understanding of the other four pre-employment transition services besides work-based learning. What are the counselors focusing on, and how are they approaching these services? Post-secondary counseling should include discussions about life after high school and benefits.
	+ There is a need to engage students earlier, as the drop-off rate between high school and post-secondary life is high.

The SRC Policy Committee then reviewed the Master Plan for Career Education Core Concepts document and generated the following feedback and questions:

Core Concept #1: Create state and regional coordinating bodies that are informed by statewide data systems and supported through technical assistance networks.

Feedback:

* Increase awareness amongst agencies.
	+ This is an opportunity for improvement. Does each agency and department have their own referral list? Is there a standard referral policy that is consistent throughout agencies and departments?
* Local Partnership Agreements (LPAs).
	+ LPAs and concepts similar to the Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) blueprint could be helpful.
	+ Ensure that LPAs have a uniform set of goals and direction related to career pathways and education.
	+ Consider regional differences.
	+ Currently, LPAs are developed through goodwill and no additional funding and resources are provided to participating agencies. Provide a structure and a paid facilitator to assist with LPA development and implementation.
	+ Have the composition of the LPAs be defined to ensure diversity and representation.
	+ Benefits planning, access to services, and community outreach could be included in the LPAs.
* Sector-based programs.
	+ Offering sector-based programming is important.
	+ Need to identify how local job markets have changed.
	+ What are the hot jobs that need to be filled and how can organizations and businesses work with DOR to increase training in these sectors?
	+ Could DOR and the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) offer grants for schools or training programs that require accreditation/licensure? Accreditation can be costly for organizations/programs and is often a barrier.

Core Concept #3: Create incentives and improve coordination to provide work-based learning opportunities for K12 students and adult learners.

Feedback:

* Accommodations
	+ Access to technology, supported employment, accommodations and resources help reduce barriers.
* Individual Placement and Support (IPS)
	+ The IPS model and wrap-around approaches could be used more broadly.
* Connection with businesses
	+ Provide businesses with training on reasonable accommodations and disability etiquette.
	+ Continue using the Demand Side Employment Initiative (DSEI) as a model to engage businesses.
	+ Explore concepts similar to the State Internship Program (SIP) that could be offered to businesses.

# Item 6: Debrief and Working Session

SRC Policy Committee debrief highlights included the following:

* DOR Application
	+ Use of the term “disability” in the application for DOR services. The word “disability” may be required by regulations.
	+ Bjerke reviewed feedback from SRC members on the DOR application that was given during the March 6 – 7, 2024 SRC quarterly meeting.
	+ Suggestion to keep the application as is and develop a supplemental page on which an applicant could identify 1) accommodations and supports needed to complete the application and 2) accommodations needed for the job.
	+ Suggestion to include a FAQ page that defines terms such as disability, conservator.
* Maintenance support
	+ Need to further explore issues regarding maintenance support as this has been a trend in the fair hearings. Develop a policy recommendation that DOR Counselors provide consumers with referral and information on other agencies that can provide maintenance support for things like childcare and housing.

# Item 7: Identification of Future SRC Policy Committee Agenda Items

The following topics were identified as possibilities for the May 2, 2024 SRC Policy Committee meeting:

* Finalize feedback and preliminary recommendations regarding the Master Plan for Career Education for presentation to the full Council during the June 5 – 6, 2024 SRC quarterly meeting. Request a DOR representative to join the May 2nd Policy Committee meeting to share information on how the Department is engaging on the Master Plan for Career Education.
* Review written follow-up information from the DOR Office of Legal Affairs on Administrative Law Judges and Fair Hearings.
* Have a presentation from DOR on maintenance supports available for consumers.
* Continue working on drafting a recommendation regarding the application for VR services.
* Receive an update from DOR on the status of SRC recommendation 2016.10 – “Consider adopting a customer experience strategy to guide the provision of services to consumers” and DOR’s response – “DOR’s Customer Service Unit (CSU) annually provides Team Managers and District Administrators with data and trends regarding consumer complaints/concerns and customer service strategies. All districts were provided a comprehensive Customer Service Training curriculum and have provided training to district staff. The DOR’s CSU, in collaboration with DOR’s Staff Development Section, will develop a customer service training component for all staff training academies.”

# Item 8: Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at noon.