

# February SECAC Meeting Minutes

## Attendees

Marsie Torchon, Michelle Blakey-Tuggle, Rob Malone, Benjamin Larson, Kimberly Welborn, Jamie Anfonson-Comeau, Janie Payne, Yvette Young, Laura McKenna, Sarah Wayland, Dreu Lindsay, Edith Linares, Spanish Interpreter-Iliana Stivason, N'tuma Kamara, Ebony Powell, Tamesha Hawkins, Sequana Janifer, A Bello, Theresa Smith, Melonee Clark, Nathalie Rosales, Doralie Palamos, LaKeisha Swan, Senait Belay, Rhonda Harris, Genevieve Jennai, Andria Thomas

## Transcript

[https://otter.ai/u/HQoR0W9Ej\\_s3Tns5jyV1-wsd3UU?view=summary](https://otter.ai/u/HQoR0W9Ej_s3Tns5jyV1-wsd3UU?view=summary)

The February 2025 meeting of the Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SEACAC) featured guest speaker Dr. Laura McKenna, an autism and education advocate, who discussed post-secondary transition pathways for students with disabilities. Dr. McKenna emphasized the importance of early planning, starting from freshman year of high school, and outlined various options including traditional four-year colleges, community colleges, trade schools, and transition programs. She highlighted the need for thorough documentation of disabilities for SSI and Medicaid applications, and the importance of long-term planning to ensure support for students' future independence and employment.

## Action Items

- [ ] Attend the March 25 SECAC town hall meeting on social, emotional, and behavioral topics.
- [ ] Attend Dr. McKenna's presentation on transition programs on March 5.
- [ ] Complete the Maryland Special Education Parent Involvement Survey by May 30.
- [ ] Reach out to the Associate Superintendent, Ms. Trinell Bowman, for additional support.

## Outline

### Introduction and Meeting Setup

- Speaker 1, Jamie Anfonson Comeau, introduces herself as the vice chairman of SEACAC and mentions that Janie Payne, the usual host, is traveling.
- Jamie welcomes members of the SEACAC board, including ex officio board member Sarah Wayland and Abella.

- The meeting's topic is introduced as transitions, with guest speaker Dr. Laura McKenna, an autism and education advocate, to discuss post-secondary transition pathways for students with disabilities.
- Jamie thanks the PGCPs partners from the Department of Special Education and introduces Michelle Blakely Tuggle, the coordinating supervisor, to provide the special education update.

### **Special Education Update by Michelle Blakely Tuggle**

- Michelle Blakely Tuggle provides updates on behalf of the Department of Special Education, mentioning a series of ABA workshops for parents.
- She outlines the remaining SEACAC meetings for the school year, including a town hall on social, emotional, and behavioral topics in March, autism and mental health awareness in April, and a final town hall in May.
- Michelle encourages parents to join the listserv for updates and to complete a survey for feedback on their experience within PGCPs schools and IEP meetings.
- She mentions the Maryland Special Education Parent Involvement Survey sent out by Maryland MSDE and the importance of parental feedback.

### **Introduction of Dr. Laura McKenna**

- Jamie thanks Michelle for the update and introduces Dr. Laura McKenna, an autism and education advocate with extensive experience in education and autism.
- Dr. McKenna begins her presentation by sharing her screen and introducing the topic: "What happens after high school?"
- She emphasizes the importance of planning for the future and the need for parents to be educated about the opportunities available for their children with disabilities.
- Dr. McKenna shares her personal experience as an autism parent and the challenges she faced in planning for her son's future.

### **Overview of Post-Secondary Transition Pathways**

- Dr. McKenna discusses the different pathways available after high school, including traditional four-year colleges, community colleges, trade schools, and transition programs.
- She explains the importance of knowing one's child well to make informed decisions about their future.
- Dr. McKenna highlights the need for creative planning and unique paths for children with disabilities, as not all will be ready for traditional college paths.
- She encourages parents to think strategically and to prepare for both best and worst-case scenarios.

### **Traditional College Programs and Community Colleges**

- Dr. McKenna provides an overview of traditional four-year college programs, including the support provided by offices of disability services.

- She discusses the advantages and limitations of community colleges, including their affordability and the availability of online courses.
- Dr. McKenna mentions the importance of starting the process early, even in middle school, to ensure a smooth transition to college.
- She emphasizes the need for parents to help their children navigate the paperwork and processes involved in getting accommodations and support in college.

## **Special Autism Programs and Transition Programs**

- Dr. McKenna introduces special autism programs within traditional colleges, such as the Enhanced Program at Ramapo College.
- She explains the benefits of these programs, including additional support and mentoring for students with autism.
- Dr. McKenna discusses transition programs for students who are not ready for college or work, including public school programs and private programs.
- She highlights the importance of these programs in helping students develop functional skills and prepare for future employment.

## **Employment Opportunities and Government Support Programs**

- Dr. McKenna discusses the various employment opportunities available for students with disabilities, including community colleges, trade schools, and 18 to 21 transition programs.
- She explains the role of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation in providing job training and support for students with disabilities.
- Dr. McKenna mentions the importance of private technical schools and the changing landscape of trade schools in supporting students with disabilities.
- She emphasizes the need for parents to explore all available options and to consider the unique needs and interests of their children.

## **Financial Planning and Government Benefits**

- Dr. McKenna provides an overview of the financial planning involved in supporting children with disabilities, including the importance of starting the SSI application process early.
- She explains the process of applying for SSI and the need to provide documentation of the child's disability.
- Dr. McKenna discusses the benefits of Medicaid and the state programs that provide additional support for families.
- She emphasizes the importance of long-term planning and the need to reassess transition plans regularly to ensure the child's needs are met.

## **Conclusion and Resources**

- Dr. McKenna concludes her presentation by encouraging parents to seek out additional resources and support.

- She mentions upcoming presentations and the availability of her company, the Autism College Connection, to provide further assistance.
- Dr. McKenna highlights the importance of community and support networks in helping parents navigate the transition process.
- She thanks the audience for their attention and encourages them to reach out with any questions or for additional support.