

STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL
National Conference Center at the Holiday Inn
399 Monmouth Street
East Windsor, NJ 08520

MINUTES

Thursday, May 17, 2007

Members in attendance: Dr. Howard Lerner, Carolyn Hayer, Philip Gartlan, Kathleen Mullery, William Sellar, Scott Elliott, Melinda Jennis, Katherine Roberson, Angela Durso, Debra Fernandez, Blanche Stetler

Members not in attendance: Dr. Norma Blecker, Dr. Sharon Maricle

Resource Representatives in attendance: Elizabeth Collins, Donna Brown, Gordon Reibman, Debbie Stewart

Resource Representatives not in attendance:

Guests and members of the public: Sol Heckelman, Stephanie Kramer, Lynn Guiser, Patricia Lang

I. ACCEPTANCE OF APRIL MINUTES

In Dr. Maricle's absence, the meeting was officially called to order at 9:40 a.m. by Co-Chairperson Dr. Howard Lerner. The April minutes were approved. **All in favor.**

II. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Disproportionality: As a follow-up to the April meeting of the SSEAC, Dr. Wohle shared with the Council a memo from the federal Office of Special Education Programs, dated April 24, 2007 regarding disproportionality of racial and ethnic groups in special education. The memo clarifies and distinguishes the requirements for "significant disproportionality," and the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Requirements (Indicators 9 and 10). The memo was consistent with the information Dr. Wohle presented at the April SSEAC meeting.

The Office of Special Education Programs is reviewing the data of those districts originally targeted during the 2006-2007 school year for disproportionate representation to identify those with "significant disproportionality." The latter group will be required to use 15% of their 2007-2008 IDEA funds to develop early intervening services.

APA/Statewide Assessments: Assistant Commissioner Barbara Gantwerk and representatives from the Office of Assessment attended a work session of the State Board of Education on May 16, 2007, to discuss issues related to the APA. The presentation included a history of the APA process, a description of the current APA, a discussion of positive aspects of the APA, the results of the federal peer review and concerns about the APA raised by district personnel and several of the professional organizations.

The federal peer review found that the APA currently includes information that is not aligned to the NJ CCC for reading and mathematics (e.g., social interactions) and the overall proficiency determinations are a combination of program indicators and student achievement. The concerns raised by the field include the following:

- Takes too long – costs too much
- In some schools the APA is a staged occurrence, not related to actual instruction
- Teachers cannot relate what they are doing to the standards
- Teachers do not see the assessment as relevant to the kinds of instruction they are providing
- Belief that functional life skills should be taught and directly assessed. In contrast, the USDOE NCLB requirements do not allow functional skills to be the focus of the assessment.

The Department intends to expand the APA Advisory Committee and revise the APA.

Council members were concerned about the elimination of the program factor rubric since this provided incentive to align programs with best practices. Dr. Wohle responded that the Department will work to maintain the connections between program, best practice and student progress in a revised APA as well as in the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Dr. Wohle shared a copy of testimony to the congressional education subcommittee, made by Dr. Rebecca Cort, Deputy Commissioner of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities in New York State. Dr. Cort is concerned about the 2% “gap students”, who do not meet the criteria for alternate assessment, yet are not able to master the grade-level standards of their non-disabled peers even with appropriate instruction. Dr. Cort recommends greater flexibility in the NCLB regulations that will permit states to develop modified standards and modified assessments that are appropriate to the developmental levels of these gap students, including out-of-grade level testing.

Governor’s Initiative: Expanding and Enhancing In-District Programs for Students with Disabilities: The grant awards have been announced; a list of the awardees was listed on the Department’s website. Two of the SSEAC members reside in districts that will be involved in the grant initiative - Montville and Hackensack (via the South Bergen Jointure Commission).

III. PRESENTATION: Montville Student Mentoring Project, Lead Mentors: Sara Probber, Allegra Stout, Alex Bernstein, Jonathan Kayne, Eddie Messick, Maranda Bretts

Lead mentors from Pathways for Exceptional Children located in Montville, NJ spoke with the Council about the program and about the Social Change Project that they have slated to institute. The mentoring program grew out of an effort to include children with disabilities in community recreation programs. The program has now expanded to include a Recreation, Life Skills and a Big Brother/Big Sister program. The Big Brother/Sister program is where mentors are paired with a student with disabilities and the mentors visit at home once a week as a homework or play buddy.

Lead mentors are now involved in a Social Change Project. The project’s purpose is to dissolve the social barriers that prevent inclusion. At the state level, mentors are encouraging the state (1) to offer best practice awards and (2) to disseminate information about the student mentoring model. At the community level, the mentors are planning “Win-Win” cooperative efforts to extend the children teaching children model to other communities. A “Freedom Readers’ project is also planned that will share mentoring experience with students from other districts.

PRESENTATION: Special Education Monitoring, Peggy McDonald, NJOSEP

Dr. McDonald outlined the self-assessment process for members of the Council. Monitoring is just one part of the state’s general supervision efforts. The monitoring system has been aligned to the State Performance Plan and now focuses on several priority monitoring areas, including transition, state assessment, discipline, LRE, disproportionality, and parent involvement. The monitoring process includes (1) the selection of target districts based on the percent of students educated outside of the

district and/or disproportionate representation of specific racial/ethnic groups in special education, (2) the establishment of an in-district steering committee to guide the self-assessment, (3) training and technical assistance, (4) data review to identify areas where the district does not meet SPP targets and non-compliance in IDEA requirements related to the SPP targets, (5) the development of continuous improvement plans, (5) reporting of monitoring results, and (6) the correction of identified non-compliance, verification of that correction, and implementation of improvement activities to meet state SPP targets.

IV. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Lynn Reuser suggested that more specific guidelines be provided regarding special education Parent Advisory Groups when the code is reopened. She is also concerned about districts that have not been identified for self-assessment who continue to place students in restrictive, self-contained settings.

V. LUNCH

Standing committees met during lunch.

VI. COUNCIL DISCUSSION/COMMITTEE REPORTS

Transition: The committee plans to contact the Transition Coordinators Network to see if they have identified any “best practices” in transition, especially those related to employability and social skills. They also plan to develop a simple survey for Child Study Supervisors to gather information about post graduation outcomes.

Inclusion: The Inclusion Committee is still seeking information from schools and school districts about their inclusive practices. They continue to explore (1) financial incentives to districts that are successfully including students in general education environments and (2) a publication (print or electric) to make teachers and administrators more aware of inclusion resources and best practices.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55 p.m. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for June 14, 2007 at the Holiday Inn in East Windsor.