

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

**MINUTES**

**Thursday, October 16, 2008**

**Members in attendance:** Dr. Sharon Maricle, Dr. Howard Lerner, William Sellar, Angela Durso, Katherine Roberson, Carolyn Hayer, Blanche Stetler and Michael Nevin

**Members not in attendance:** Philip Gartlan, Scott Elliott, Debra Fernandez, Kathleen Mullery

**Resource Representatives in attendance:** Robert Paige, Gordon Reibman

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:** Debbie Stewart and Elizabeth Collins

**Guests and members of the public:** Melinda Jennis, Lauren Agoratus

**I. ACCEPTANCE OF SEPTEMBER MINUTES**

The meeting was officially called to order at 9:53 a.m. by Chairperson Sharon Maricle. The September minutes were approved and seconded. **All in favor.**

**II. PRESENTATIONS**

***NJDOE Social and Character Education Initiative***

***Philip M. Brown, PhD, Director, Center for Social and Character Development, Rutgers University***

Dr. Brown presented an overview of the current projects at the Center for Social and Character Development which has been at Rutgers University for the past seven years. There are currently four grant-funded projects (2006 – 2010). He spoke to the Council specifically about the *Caring Schools Inclusion Project* (CSIP) which is evaluating the impact of an evidence-based character education program on the social inclusion of students with disabilities in 12 middle schools. CSIP utilizes a school-wide intervention, Community of Caring, to focus on creating a school culture that will promote the commitment and skills of school staff, students, and parents to provide opportunities for growth and development for all students. Community of Caring is the only character education program with a focus on students with disabilities. The project is in its third year and Dr. Brown discussed some of the issues lessons learned: 1) qualitative surveys have shown that there are climate, perception and terminology issues involved in conducting the survey; 2) middle school students don't understand "disabilities", thinking of them as physical, not behavioral, learning or emotional; and 3) the significance of administrative leadership with regard to program sustainability. Lastly, he shared the five values of the CoC: caring, respect, responsibility, trust and family. Dr. Brown then opened the floor to questions.

***NJDOE Intimidation, Harassment and Bullying Regulations – PowerPoint Presentation  
Paula Bloom, Safe Schools Specialist, Office of Educational Support Services, New Jersey  
Department of Education***

Ms. Bloom spoke to the Council on Bullying, citing that 15 to 30 percent of students report either being bullies themselves or being bullied. Nationally, 160,000 students miss school each day due to fear or bullying. There are three descriptors of bullying: harassment over time, mental/physical harm and an imbalance of power with a focus on the offender, the victim and the bystander. Additionally, there are two kinds of bullying, direct and indirect (rumors, text messaging, internet). There is minimal research specifically related to bullying and students in special education programs. Ms. Bloom discussed the landmark case of *LW v. Toms River School District* which found that the school district had allowed a “hostile school environment” to develop. Ms. Bloom discussed data collection requirements, indicating that All New Jersey public school districts (including charter schools) must use the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System (EVVRS) to report all incidents of violence, vandalism, weapons, and substance abuse that occur in their schools, as well as to report suspensions of students with disabilities for reasons *not* related to violence, vandalism, weapons, or substance abuse. Ms. Bloom also outlined three New Jersey Initiatives: 1) Developing Safe and Civil Schools: Social-Emotional and Character Development (200 participating schools), 2) Social Norm Project (a survey driven campaign to change perceptions with 28 participating schools), and 3) Rutgers Safe and Drug Free School and Communities Project.

### **III. DIRECTOR’S UPDATE**

**Indicator 8 – Parent Survey Data Collection:** Dr. Wohle indicated that the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Bloustein Center for Survey Research, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University to collect data for the federally required State Performance Plan Indicator # 8 – Parent Involvement.. The Bloustein Center will distribute a paper version survey to parents of students with disabilities in the second cadre of districts, develop a web-based alternative to the paper version of the survey; and collect the data responses. .

**Local District Public Reports** – Dr. Wohle distributed a sample of the Local District Special Education Data Profiles for 2006-2007. The profiles will include the following:

Performance Indicators: Indicator 1-Graduation Rates, Indicator 2- Drop-out Rates, Indicator 3-Assessment, Indicator 4-Suspension/Expulsion Rates, Indicator 5-Least Restrictive Environment, Indicator 8-Parent Involvement, Indicator 14 – Post Secondary Transition

Compliance Indicators: Indicators 9 and 10-Disproportionality, Indicator 11-Child Find, Indicator 12-Early Childhood Transition, Indicator 13-Postsecondary Transition

The profiles will be made public early in November 2008.

**State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report Stakeholder Meeting:** Dr. Wohle indicated that a meeting of the New Jersey Special Education Stakeholders Group has been scheduled for December 11, 2008 at LRC-Central. As in previous years, Kristin Reedy, Director, Northeast Regional Resource Center will facilitate the meeting. New Jersey Office of Special Education Programs’ staff

will present information regarding progress toward meeting the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report targets.

**Future SSEAC Meetings:** Dr. Wohle indicated that she would discuss the NJDOE local district determination process at the next meeting of the SSEAC. Additionally, a presentation regarding the New Jersey Preschool Expansion is being planned.

#### **IV. COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

Michael Nevin expressed a concern about the focus on academic versus functional skills and the participation of students with disabilities in the statewide assessment system. Dr. Wohle recommended that a letter be drafted during the reauthorization of NCLB/IDEA with regard to statewide assessment requirements.

Following the topics of character education, bullying, harassment and intimidation, the Council discussed the related topics of disability awareness, social skill development, and social inclusion. The Council agreed to table discussion concerning the Transition letter until next month.

Council members inquired as to the status of the Speech Correctionist Certification. Dr. Wohle indicated that the State Board would be voting on the Professional Standards and Licensure regulations in November.

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#### **V. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

In keeping with the presentations on bullying and character education, Melinda Jennis, President of Pathways for Exceptional Children, discussed several of the organization's initiatives (including grant awards) that focus on employment training for students with disabilities and the mentoring program that prepares "mentors" for children with special needs, enabling their participation in various community recreation programs. Both programs are intended to promote independence and community inclusion. Additionally, Ms. Jennis voiced concerns regarding the special education regulation requiring a district board of education to ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities. Specifically, Ms. Jennis indicated concerns regarding how the group was to be representative of parent concerns without the potential for alienation and/or retribution.

#### **VI. LUNCH**

#### **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned after lunch at 1:51 p.m. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 20, 2008 at the Holiday Inn in East Windsor.