



**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

State Special Education Advisory Council (NJ-SSEAC) Annual Report



2022-2023

Letter from the Chairperson

As Chairperson of the NJ State Special Education Advisory Council (NJ-SSEAC), I am proud and honored to share with you our annual report for the 2022-2023 meeting year. Based on the roles and responsibilities for state advisory panels in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (§300.169), the NJ-SSEAC has engaged in meaningful and robust dialogue, interactive information sharing, and critical data analysis that resulted in a clearly defined priority setting work plan and subsequent recommendation considerations.

I value and commend our 2022-2023 NJ-SSEAC Assistant Chairperson, Council Secretary, Council Members, Proxy Alternatives, and State Resource Members for their diligence, dedication, and professionalism in “keeping the main thing the main thing: our students.” Our collective efficacy resulted in 100% quorum in meetings, establishment and maintenance of five active subcommittees, identification and action planning centered on three unanimously agreed upon priorities, thirteen recommendations, and one letter to our NJDOE Commissioner.

Notwithstanding the tireless and prolific efforts of our esteemed colleagues from NJDOE Office of Special Education (OSE), we remain committed to provide integral input to address the education of children and youth with disabilities who are IDEA eligible.

Sincerely,

Dr. Paul Barbato

Council Chairperson



Dr. Paul Barbato

Chairperson

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities

Representative of an Institution of Higher Education



Debbie Esposito

Assistant Chairperson

Representative of the State Parent Advisory Network (SPAN) Parent Training and Information Center;

Parent of or Individual with a Disability



Dr. Harold Abraham

General Education Principal;

Parent of or Individual with a Disability;

Representative of an Institution of Higher Education



John Worthington, Esq.

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities;

Parent of or Individual with a Disability



Jennifer Vecchiarelli

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities

2022-2023 Council Members



Dr. Pam Brillante

Representative of an Institution of Higher Education



Dr. Eniola Ajayi

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities;

Local Education Representative of McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Subtitle B of Title VII)



Dr. Dorothy McMullen

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities;

Parent of or Individual with a Disability



Elizabeth Alves

Private School Representative

Member of the Child Study Team

Representative Concerned with the Provision of Transition Services to Children with Disabilities



Jocelyn Gottlieb

Parent of or Individual with a Disability



Dr. Lottie Watson

Administrator of a Programs for Children with Disabilities;

Charter School Representative



Dr. Margaret "Peggy" McDonald

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities



Scott Longazel

Parent of or Individual with a Disability



Dr. Cynthia DeFina

Administrator of Programs for Children with Disabilities;

Member of the Child Study Team – School Psychologist



Dr. Carmen Henderson

Administrator of a Programs for Children with Disabilities

Member of the Child Study Team – Learning Disabilities Consultant

Parent of or Individual with a Disability

Proxy Alternatives

Under Article III. Council Membership it defines a Proxy Individual as "... a person who is designated by an Advisory Council member to represent them at an Advisory Council meeting in their absence. Proxy individuals are not officially Advisory Council members, but they are authorized to act for another Advisory Council member when that member cannot attend".



Dr. Lori Alter
Administrator at a
Private School



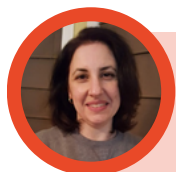
**Rafeeza
Shahabudeen**
Teacher



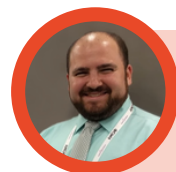
Jennifer Kaufman
Administrator at a Private School

State Resource Members

State Resource Members, in alignment to Article III. Council Membership (34 CFR 300.168) of the NJ-SSEAC Bylaws, indicates required representation from state agencies that have direct involvement with and influence to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. These members are not appointed by the state education agency, but are assigned by the state agency for which they are representing.



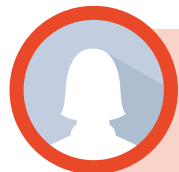
**Donna M.
Holzschuh**
NJ Juvenile Justice
Commission



Daniel Heitner
Family Health
Services, NJ
Department of Health



**Kelley
Michalowski**
NJ Department of
Children and Families



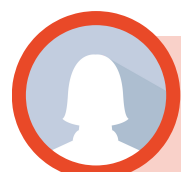
Eva Scott
New Jersey
Commission for the
Blind and Visually
Impaired



Toni Scott
Division of
Vocational
Rehabilitation
Services



**Pheobie
Thomas**
State McKinney-
Vento Education
for Homeless
Children and
Youth Program



Tahleedah Hill
Department of
Corrections

About the Council

The NJ-SSEAC supports an educational system that achieves excellence, equity, and lifelong learning for all eligible children and youth with disabilities under IDEA in New Jersey. The NJ-SSEAC is committed to representing children and youth ages 3 through 21 with diverse and changing educational needs.



The NJ-SSEAC responsibilities include offering advice, consultation, and recommendations to the New Jersey State Board of Education and State Commissioner of Education on matters of unmet needs concerning special education and related services in New Jersey public schools.

The NJ-SSEAC provides a broad base of stakeholder input on policies, practices, and issues related to the education of children and youth with disabilities who are IDEA eligible. In addition to the federal requirements for Advisory Council members, the NJ-SSEAC will seek out and identify best practices and anticipate future needs for students with disabilities.

Council Functions

Advising on the Unmet Needs

Advise the State Education Agency (SEA) of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities (CFR 300.169(a))

Corrective Action

Advise the SEA in developing Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports. (CFR 300.169(d))

Consult on the Provisions of FAPE

Waiver of nonsupplant requirement. The State must consult with the Advisory Council regarding provisions of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). (CFR 300.164(c)(4))

Comment Publicly

Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children and youth with disabilities. (CFR 300.169(b))

Implementing and Coordinating Policy

Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies on the coordination of services for children and youth with disabilities. (CFR 300.169(e))

Data Reporting and Evaluations

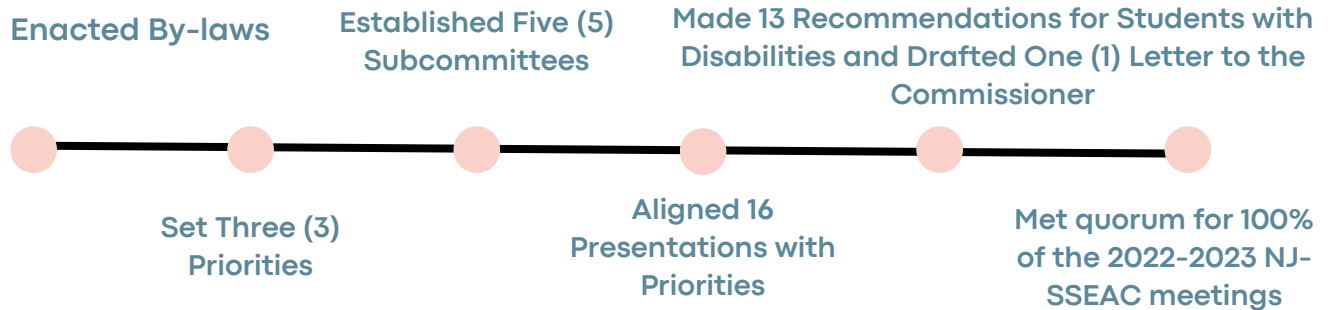
Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary of the Advisory Council under 618. (CFR 300.169(c))

Review Due Process Decisions

The SEA, after deleting personally identifiable information, must: (a.) Provide the NJ-SSEAC with Due Process Hearing (DPH) findings and decisions; and, (b.) Make those DPH findings and decisions available to the public. (CFR 300.513(d) and CFR 300.514(c))

(NJ-SSEAC Bylaws, 2022)

2022-2023 Council Accomplishments



2022-2023 Council Meeting Presentations

The 2022-2023 “Council-Driven Work Plan” was priority-focused. The Office of Special Education built council member capacity to enhance subcommittee work through intentional collaboration and planning for each of the monthly meetings. Presentations, panels, interactive discussions and spotlights were integrated throughout the council year. An overview of the presentations and topics covered is outlined below.



State Agency Information Updates

Understanding the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report

Presenter: Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director, Office of Special Education

SSIP & Implementation Science: Improving Student Learning Outcomes

Presenter: Mrs. Erice Reid, Inclusion Specialist, Office of Special Education

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Introduction, Data and Monitoring Practices from the OSE

Presenters: Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director, and Mrs. Jennifer Spear, Monitor, Office of Special Education

Transition Planning Services and the Impact of Mental Health

Presenter: Mrs. JoAnn Johnson, Transition Specialist, Office of Special Education

New Jersey Department of Education’s Focus on Mental Health

Presenters: Mr. Luiz Periera, Director, and Ms. Kelly Allen, Manager, Office of Student Support Services

Children’s System of Care – An Overview

Presenter: Nicholas Pecht, Children’s System of Care, NJ Department of Children and Families (DCF)



Office of Special Education Spotlights

The NEW Office of Special Education Website

Presenter: Mrs. Alexandra Pensiero, Ed.S., Federal Reporting and Engagement Specialist, Office of Special Education

Facilitated Individualized Education Programs (FIEPs)

Presenter: Mrs. Cynthia Hoenes-Saindon, Special Education Ombudsman, Office of Special Education

NJETA: School-Age and Preschool - Then and Now

Presenter: Mr. Fred Buglione and Ms. Corinne Catalano, New Jersey Initiative for Addressing Inclusive Education (NJETA)

The NEW Local Special Education Profiles

Presenter: Mrs. Alexandra Pensiero, Federal Reporting and Engagement Specialist, Office of Special Education

Color My World Autism Awareness Project

Presenter: Dr. Amanda Philp, Autism Specialist, Office of Special Education



Stakeholder and Local Education Spotlights

Inclusive Outdoor Spaces in Perth Amboy

Presenter: Dr. Jessica Neu, BCBA-D, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Perth Amboy Public Schools

Inclusive Preschool Decision-Making Practices

Presenters: Mrs. Annie Corley-Hand, Principal of Mary Kay McMillin Early Childhood Center, and Mrs. Michele Gardner, Director of Berkeley Heights Public Schools Special Services Department

Small Town, Big Impact with Manasquan High School

The Center for Learning and Independence (CLI): 18-21 Program

Presenter: Ms. Jennifer Steffich, Director of Special Services, Manasquan School District

Addressing Mental Health in Schools: The Power or Partnerships

Presenter: Mr. Michael J. Tozzoli, MSW, LCSW, Chief Executive Officer of West Bergen Mental Healthcare

Innovations in Special Education Award

Sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association and ASAH, which serves the private special education community

Presenter(s): Dr. Karen Cortellino, President NJSBA, Ms. Irene LeFebvre, Immediate Past President of NJSBA, and Mr. John Mulholland, Executive Director of ASAH

2022-2023 Review

The NJ-SSEAC meets monthly (except July, August, and December), and each meeting is open to the public. All meeting sites are barrier free and accessible for all persons with disabilities, including the provision of a sign language interpreter when needed. Accommodations are made for individuals who are non-English speaking. All meetings were conducted in accordance with the Parliamentary Procedures set forth in the corresponding version of Robert's Rules of Order and the New Jersey Sunshine Law.

Dates of 2022-2023 Council Meetings:

- October 20, 2022 (Closed Orientation)
- November 17, 2022 (Virtual)
- January 19, 2023 (Virtual)
- February 16, 2023 (Virtual)
- March 16, 2023 (Virtual)
- April 13, 2023 (Virtual)
- May 18, 2023 (Virtual)
- June 8, 2023 (In-Person/Virtual)

Priorities and Recommendations

In September of 2022, and with the assistance of John Copenhaver from the Technical Assistance Center for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE), the newly appointed State Special Education Advisory Council set three priorities for the 2022- 2023 Council year. The established priorities resulted in council recommendations that were put forth to the Office of Special Education for consideration in June of 2023.



Priority 1: Recruitment and Retention

2022-2023 Priority 1 Recommendations:

- This subcommittee did not make direct recommendations to the Office of Special Education and/or Commissioner. However, it was recommended by the council members to support a recent package of bills introduced in the Legislature to address recruitment and retention of teachers in New Jersey. A letter to this effect, stating specific reasons for the recommendations, has been drafted.



Priority 2: Mental Health

2022-2023 Priority 2 Recommendations:

- Enhance Mental Health data collection and funding allocations during the transition to NJ4S.
- Improve alignment of student and youth service agencies to better coordinate existing services.
- Develop and provide clear guidelines and support with regards to psychiatric clearances in order to ensure that students' needs are met, while at the same time maintaining safety and security for all special education students.



Priority 3: Least Restrictive Environment

2022-2023 Priority 3 Recommendations:

- The development of training specific to IEP software vendors to capture special education placement data, in line with the SPP/APR data indicators, consistently across the state.
- An increase in the frequency and scope of outreach to educators and families with regard to free resources from the NJIETA project and SPAN that promote opportunities for students with IEPs to be educated with peers in general education settings.
- NJDOE to provide training to parents, teachers, child study team members, school and district leaders on the federal and state requirements for educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, strategies and evidence-based practices for inclusion and IEP development.
- The development and dissemination of additional information by the NJDOE on how to calculate the percentage of time an individual student is in general/regular education in the form of brief documents (e.g., Tip Sheets) for administrators, child study teams, parents and IEP vendors. The subcommittee also recommends additional training on calculating time in general/regular education for the same audiences.
- Increase accountability for local districts that do not meet State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Plan targets for placement in the LRE. In addition, districts that do not meet targets for placement in the LRE should be required to send staff to LRE training. Additional accountability could include development of action plans to meet targets.

2022- 2023 Annual NJ-SSEAC Survey

The New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Special Education utilizes an Annual State Special Education Advisory Council (NJ-SSEAC) Survey to assess the council's satisfaction and reflection from the most recent year.

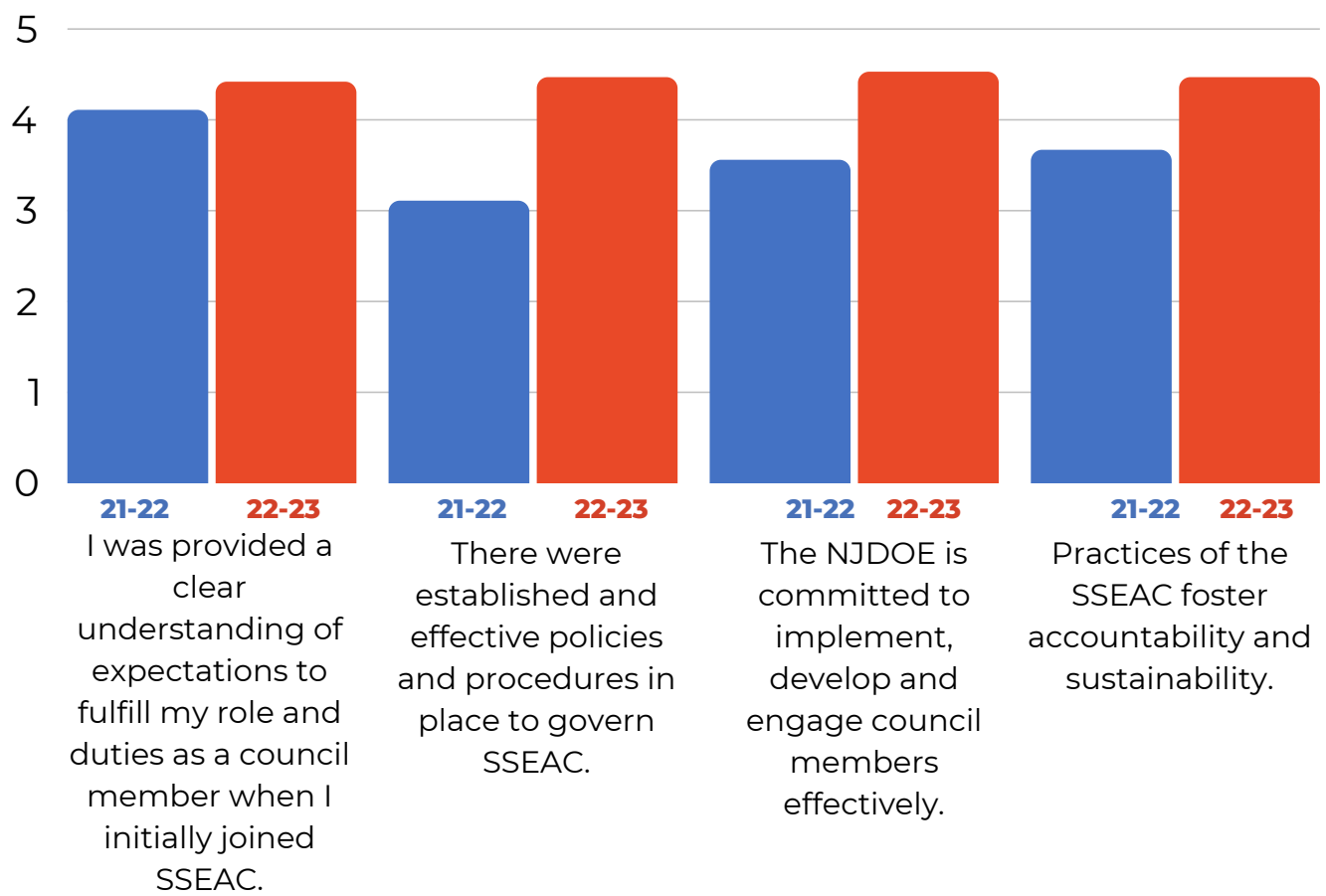
The council's individual input is confidential and used as a reflection tool for the Office of Special Education. The qualitative and quantitative information drives continuous improvement for the NJ-SSEAC and ensures alignment to state and federal regulations.

The survey is divided into three Domains:

- Organization and Infrastructure
- Presentation and Resources
- Effective and Meaningful Engagement

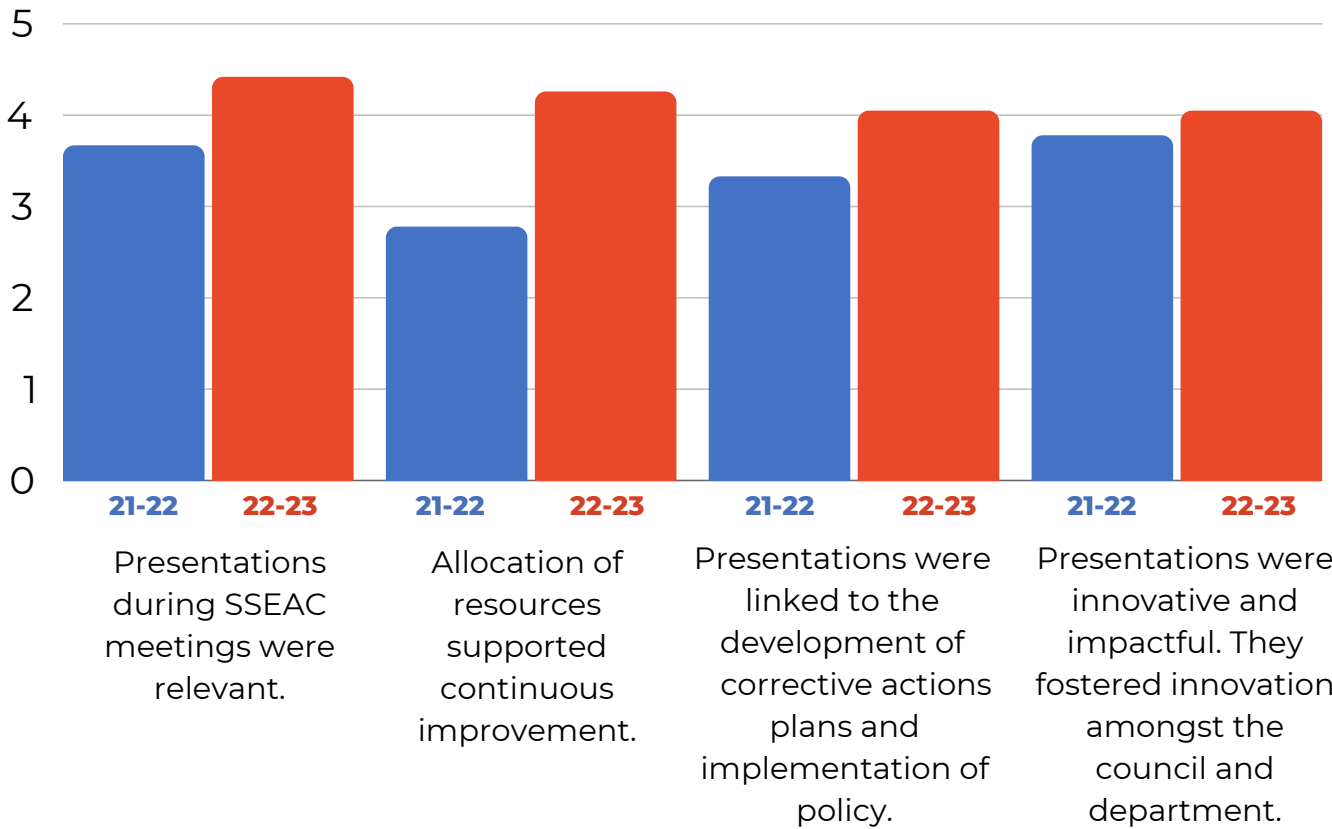
There are four to six questions evaluated on a Five-Point Likert Scale as well as two open-ended response options for each of the designated Domains. The following data is a reflection of the information most recently collected from **2022-2023** and compared to the results from the **2021-2022** council year.

Domain 1: Organization and Infrastructure

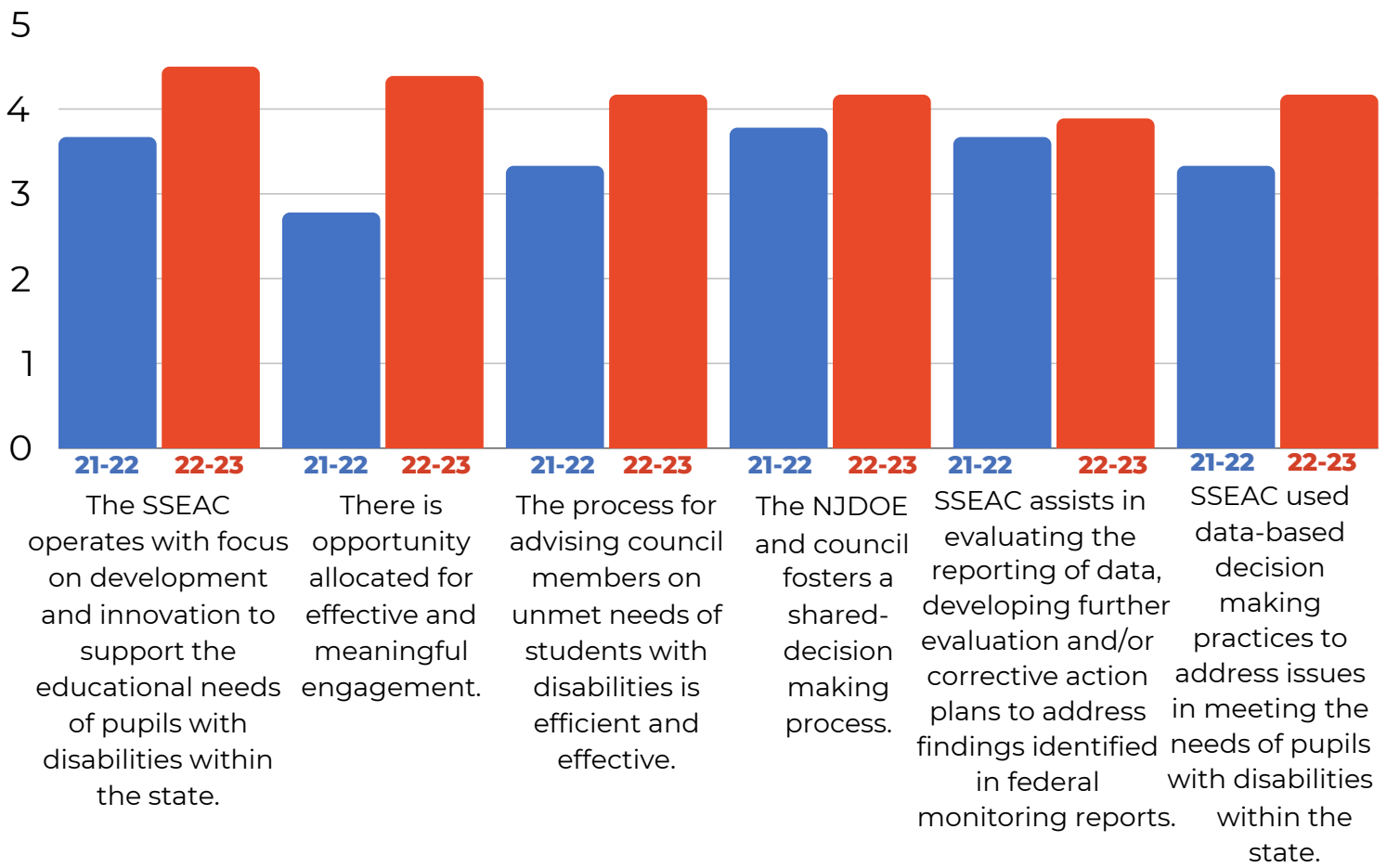


2022- 2023 Annual NJ-SSEAC Survey

Domain 2: Presentations and Resources



Domain 3: Effective and Meaningful Engagement



2022-2023

Meeting Agendas and Minutes

Meetings for the 2022-2023 NJ-SSEAC were provided with public notice of time and place. Additionally, the agendas were posted three to five business days prior to the event. Concurrently, and as reflected in Article VI. of the NJ-SSEAC Bylaws: (12) "All NJ-SSEAC meeting minutes must be 'reasonably comprehensible'. At a minimum, the minutes must reflect the time and place of each meeting, members present, subjects considered, actions taken, and votes of each member". Links to the agendas and minutes for the 2022-2023 council year can be accessed below.

Month of Meeting	Link	Link
November	Agenda	Minutes
January	Agenda	Minutes
February	Agenda	Minutes
March	Agenda	Minutes
April	Agenda	Minutes
May	Agenda	Minutes
June	Agenda	Minutes

Anticipated Membership Vacancies for the 2023-2024 Council Year



**Charter School
Representative**



**Teacher
Representative**