

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)

**Robert Wood Johnson Fitness and Wellness Center
3100 Quakerbridge Road
Mercerville, NJ**

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 13, 2018

Members in attendance: Paul Barbato, Susan Colacello, Barbara Gantwerk, Vanessa Lombardo, Deborah Lynam, Andrea Moore, Kristy Ritvalsky, Chris Shamburg, Lynda Shanahan, Amy Smith, Susan Vandermark

Members not in attendance: Viviana Litovsky, Leslie Rubinstein, Kerri Walsifer

Resource Representatives in attendance: Eva Scott, Cheri Thompson, Deborah Verbos

Resource Representative not in attendance: Donna Holzschuh, Kelley Michalowski

State Board Members in attendance: Mary Beth Berry, Kathy Goldenberg

Guests and members of the public: Lauren Agoratus, Dr. Luann Breese, E. Jennifer Brown, Maria Echavarria, Sol Heckelman, Camy Kobylinski, Matt Korobkin, Lauren Krempecki, Don Lorenz, Maria Lorenz, Iris Medina

I. Call to Order/Election

The meeting was called to order by Chair Deborah Lynam at 9:49 a.m.

Deborah Lynam was re-elected as Chair and Dr. Paul Barbato was elected Co-chair for the 2018-2019 year.

II. Acceptance of October Minutes

The October minutes were reviewed. They were approved with one abstention.

III. Directors Update

Dr. Peggy McDonald updated the Council on the selection of a director for the Office of Special Education (OSE) and stated that a selection was made but there was not a start date in place.

Dr. McDonald updated the Council on the status of the SSEAC letter to the Commissioner of Education on behalf of Amy Anderson. She also discussed the creation of a deaf education advisory panel at the Department of Education (DOE). She asked Council members to speak to her if they were interested in volunteering to participate on the panel.

Dr. McDonald informed the Council that the January 17, 2019 SSEAC meeting would also be an OSE Stakeholder meeting.

Dr. McDonald gave updates on ongoing DOE projects: Community Based Instruction (CBI), Person Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition (PCAST), Positive Behavior Supports in Schools (PBSIS) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). It was suggested that a presentation be made to the Council on the latest ESSA reporting.

IV. Old Business

Council members reviewed and discussed the July 2018 memorandum that OSE distributed to districts concerning restraint and seclusion. There was lengthy discussion regarding the effects of school climate and the need for additional district and building-wide training on restraint and seclusion for administrators, staff provided by outside vendors, support staff, security, bus drivers, etc. Also discussed were methods of de-escalation to avoid the need for restraint and seclusion. The Council was in agreement to create a committee to further discuss the topic. The following Council members volunteered as committee members: Dr. Christopher Shamburg, Dr. Paul Barbato, Amy Smith, Andrea Moore, Kristy Ritvasky, Lynda Shanahan and Barbara Gantwerk.

V. New Business

Susan Colacello inquired as to what was happening at DOE in regard to the emails that were received by some Council members from parents with concerns about special education in the Paterson school district. Dr. McDonald assured the Council that all appropriate district and department staff are aware of the emails and that the concerns are being addressed.

Dr. Christopher Shamburg inquired as to what will be happening with PARCC and/or other statewide assessments. It was suggested that a presentation on assessment would be of interest at a future Council meeting.

VI. Announcements

State Board of Education Vice President Kathy Goldenberg shared with the Council that there are now two sign language interpreters present at each monthly Board of Education meeting. She also said that she attended the national state boards of education conference in Denver, CO and that there will be a national focus by state boards on social and emotional learning (SEL).

Cheri Thompson from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services informed the Council of a two million dollar grant available to districts to fund summer internships; as well as grant opportunities to provide services to students through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Susan Colacello recommended that Council members visit the website sponsored by the Social Emotional Learning Alliance for New Jersey at <https://sel4nj.org/>

VII. Public Comment

Lauren Agoratus shared that she is very involved with several restraint and seclusion initiatives. She suggested the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) as a resource for training information. She also suggested that districts can call a mobile response unit.

Dr. Luann Breese from the Elizabeth School District mentioned several issues regarding English as a Second Language (ESL) services in the district.

Maria Echavarria from the Elizabeth School District stated that there is a lack of guidance from administrators regarding the districts Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG). She also spoke of instances of parents not being listened to/dismissed by the Board of Education at meetings.

Camy Kobylinski from the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) announced that the portal to apply to be a presenter at the 2019 NJEA Conference was now open on the NJEA website.

Iris Medina from the Elizabeth School District spoke to the Council about specific incidences where the district wasn't providing services to her child.

Maria Lorenz from the Elizabeth School District spoke of the lack of a behavior specialist and after-school and recreational programs for special education students in her child's school. She stated that there was a newly opened life skills class with six students.

Sol Heckelman of the NJ Association of School Psychiatrists mentioned several restraint resources and encouraged the use of restorative practices. He suggested that Child Study Teams (CSTs) and School Psychologists should be used as gate keepers when restraint or seclusion practices might become necessary.

Jennifer Brown from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD) shared that NJCDD had an updated position paper on restraint. She mentioned that the organization had issued a grant and will be working with the recipient, Hudson County, beginning in 2019. As a parent with personal experience with restraint being used with her son, she appreciated the Council having this conversation.

Dr. McDonald invited the parents from the Elizabeth School District to speak with her at the conclusion of the meeting.

VIII. Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 p.m.

The next meeting will be a joint SSEAC/Stakeholder meeting scheduled for Thursday, January 17, 2019 at the Robert Wood Johnson Fitness and Wellness Center in Mercerville, New Jersey.