

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Skype for Business

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 11, 2020

Members in attendance: Paul Barbato, Susan Colacello, Debbie Esposito, Barbara Gantwerk, Viviana Litovsky, Deborah Lynam, Andrea Moore, Leslie Rubinstein, Chris Shamburg, Lynda Shanahan, Susan Vandermark

Members not in attendance: Kristy Ritvalsky, Kerri Walsifer

Resource Representatives in attendance: Donna Holzschuh, John Tkacz, Kelly Michalowski, Eva Scott

Resource Representatives not in attendance: Dawn Mergen, Cheri Thompson

Guests and members of the public: Karen Slagle, Kelly Emanuel, Matthew Korobkin, Kaleigh Brendle, Lauren Agoratus, Lauren English-Mezzino, Sol Heckelman, Peggy McDonald, Dominic Rota, Damian Petino, Kim Murray, Kim Buxenbaum, Elaine Bobrove, Mary Beth Berry, Kathy Goldenberg

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Deborah Lynam, Chair at 9:36 a.m.

II. Acceptance of February Minutes

The May minutes were reviewed and were approved unanimously with no corrections.

III. Office of Special Education Updates

Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director Office of Special Education, updated the Council regarding COVID-19 guidance being issued by the NJDOE and OSEP. Currently waiting on ESY guidance approval. Also working on re-opening guidelines for the fall. Work groups are meeting to discuss the following: operations within buildings, transportation, aides, PPE, etc. Parents and school district have reached out with questions and concerns. The Office welcomes questions and comments from stakeholders. There is no perfect answer to each school district's situations and the NJDOE is working to provide the most comprehensive guidance. The Department of Health (DOH) clearance and guidance is needed. Currently directing district to work with their County Health Department and local authorities. Additional information will be provided when districts are considering in-person learning. Dr. Buxenbaum also stated that the Mental Health Group continues to meet virtually to work on resource guide.

Dr. Buxenbaum and Dominic Rota, Director of Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution continue to host "roadshows" with various stakeholders: County Education Specialists, NJASA, NJPSA, APSSD, School Board Association, SPAN, NJCD, Autism NJ, etc.

Continually processing comments and feedback from all. The Offices are trying to be accessible and responsive to all who reach out; however, there are currently more questions than answers. Encouraged everyone to continue to reach out to the Offices.

Dr. Buxenbaum answered questions regarding evaluations being conducted virtually and commented that OSEP has been meeting with service providers and evaluators to discuss options.

Assistant Commissioner of Student Services, Dr. Peggy McDonald thanked Council Members Deborah Lyman, Susan Colacello and Leslie Rubinstein for their service, commitment and time to SSEAC. Wished them all the best in the future.

State Board Update provided by Kathy Goldenberg. Mrs. Goldenberg noted that the State Board of Education has been involved with NJDOE meetings to help determine the return to schools. Board of Education members are divided into various groups. NJDOE will consider USDOE guidance when providing guidance. Mary Beth Berry commented that DOE, parents and teachers are doing a great job during this time. 89,000 students do not have access to technology. Dr. McDonald noted that a survey was taking place this week to determine number of students with IEPs who do not have technology and the DOE can use CARES funds for this need.

IV. Presentation

Kaleigh Brendle, a NJ student who is legally blind and files a lawsuit against College Board, joined SSEAC to discuss her struggles as a student and her recent filing against College Board. Her presentation was inspiring as she has been able to achieve high levels of success despite her disability.

V. Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

VI. New Business

Susan Colacello discussed 4 studies that have been conducted that indicate that students with disabilities are six times more likely to have a fatal result from a COVID-19 infection and different kids have different infection rates.

VII. Announcements

The Offices are actively working to identify new SSEAC members.
Dr. Buxenbaum thanked the retiring Council Members for their time.

VIII. Public Comment

Public Comments can be submitted to SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov

IX. Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:06 a.m.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for a virtual meeting Thursday, September 17, 2020.