

# **State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)**

## **Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Skype for Business**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, November 12, 2020**

**Members in attendance:** Paul Barbato, Debbie Esposito, Mark Brugger, Barbara Gantwerk, Vikas Jain, Viviana Litovsky, Andrea Moore, Lonjete Nias, Kristy Ritvalsky, Lynda Shanahan, Kerri Walsifer, Pat White, Susan Vandermark

**Members not in attendance:** Chris Shamburg

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

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:**

**Guests and members of the public:** Dominic Rota, Damian Petino, Kim Buxenbaum, Mary Beth Berry, Bill Freeman, Lauren English-Mezzino

#### **I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director of Office of Special Education at 9:36am.

#### **II. Acceptance of October Minutes**

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

#### **III. Introduction of New Council Members**

Dr. Paul Barbato, SSEAC Chair, introduced each new Council Member and asked that each of them provide their own background and reasons for their interest in joining SSEAC.

#### **IV. Office of Special Education Updates**

Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director Office of Special Education, updated the Council regarding the continued support the Offices are providing to the school districts as teaching formats are continually shifting. The Mental Health Quick Reference Guide is now available on the website. Dr. Buxenbaum is proud of the collaborative effort with all the other agencies involved to put together this valuable resource for all the stakeholders. SPP/APR new package is now available with some changes. None of these changes will impact the 2020-2021 school year; however, 2021 through 2023 school years will be impacted. The Offices will be discussing how to manage these changes. The Inclusion initiative is up and running with services and supports in place in school districts.

State Board Update provided by Mary Beth Berry. Mrs. Berry is looking forward to working with the Acting Commissioner Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillian and the leadership she will bring to the Department of Education. Mrs. Berry was also able to review the resumes of the each of

the new SSEAC Council Members and is impressed with the passion for special education each of them demonstrated in their resume. Mrs. Berry welcomed the new members to the Council.

#### **IV. Presentation**

Bill Freeman, CSPD Coordinator with the Office of Special Education, presented on the Guardianship Brochure which was developed through a collaboration among the Office of Special Education, DHS and DCF. Printable and viewable versions are available on the Office's website.

Mary Beth Berry stated that this is a great resource for parents and school districts. Debbie Esposito commented that SPAN would be able to inform stakeholders of this resource and Kritsy Ritvalsky inquired about the availability of the brochure in other languages.

#### **V. Old Business**

Distribute last meetings minutes and presentation information to the new Council Members

#### **VI. New Business**

Debbie Esposito encouraged the DOE to remind school districts of the importance of the Special Education Advisory Groups in each district. SPAN is currently working to stress the importance of these groups. Ms. Esposito asked about an effective and systematic way to reach out to each district and remind them of this requirement.

Kerri Walsifer discussed the challenges parents currently face due to COVID 19 and stressed that parents need training during this time.

#### **VII. Announcements**

Directors Annual Toolkit Conference 11/13/2020

#### **VIII. Public Comment**

Public Comments can be submitted to [SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov](mailto:SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov)

#### **IX. Adjournment**

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 10:34 a.m.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for a virtual meeting Thursday, January 21, 2021.