

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Skype for Business

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Members in attendance: Paul Barbato, Debbie Esposito, Barbara Gantwerk, Viviana Litovsky, Andrea Moore, Lynda Shanahan, Kerri Walsifer

Members not in attendance: Kristy Ritvalsky, Susan Vandermark, Chris Shamburg

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

Resource Representatives not in attendance: Cheri Thompson,

Guests and members of the public: Peggy McDonald, Dominic Rota, Damian Petino, Kim Murray, Kim Buxenbaum, Mary Beth Berry, Sol Heckelman

I. Call to Order

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

II. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Barbara Gantwerk nominated Dr. Paul Barbato as Chair – approved unanimously.
Barbara Gantwerk nominated Debbie Esposito as Vice-Chair – approved unanimously.

III. Acceptance of June Minutes

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

IV. Office of Special Education Updates

Dr. Peggy MacDonald, Assistant Commissioner, congratulated Dr. Paul Barbato and Debbie Esposito on their new positions on SSEAC and thanked them for their continued service. Dr. MacDonald noted that everyone is acclimating on our new way of doing business and everyone is continuing to work hard at NJDOE. NJDOE was able to provide guidance for the summer and “The Road Back” was a collaborative document utilizing a National framework along with an extensive number of stakeholders. Special education was included in all work groups to provide input into all sections of the document. “The Road Back” is a flexible plan with recommendations and resources for educators and parents. It was designed to be a living document which could be modified and changed as conditions change. NJDOE continues to work internally and with other state agencies as we continue through these unprecedented times. The Division of Student Services, specifically Leslie Franks-McRae’s office, is in the process of

facilitating a way to service the gifted students with better educational opportunities. Districts are in the process of identifying these students while NJDOE is working to scale up programs for gifted students.

Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director Office of Special Education, updated the Council regarding the collaboration of all the Offices within the Division of Student Services to ensure special needs and ELL students are being serviced during this time. Dr. Buxenbaum congratulated Paul and Debbie for their positions on SSEAC and thanked them for their continued service.

State Board Update provided by Mary Beth Berry. Mrs. Berry is impressed with the level of hard work by everyone during this time. Mrs. Berry voiced concern about the digital divide and noted the NJDOE is working to ensure everyone has access to technology. Mrs. Berry noted “The Road Back” is an impressive and great document. Mrs. Berry attend at CTE meeting discussing Career Tech Education and commented that these types of programs are great for those students with special needs and was impressed with the amount of work which goes into these programs. The programs are important to ensure any student who exits these programs are ready for the work force. Mrs. Berry asked Dr. Buxenbaum for an update regarding the Mental Health Group. Dr. Buxenbaum advised the Council that the Mental Health Group has continued to meet with stakeholders and has begun considering the stressors associated with virtual learning. The Group has not been able to produce a full resource guide, but has developed a quick resource guide that the Group hopes to place in a broadcast by early November at the latest.

IV. Presentation

Dominic Rota, Esq., Director of Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution presented Special Education Regulations (N.J.A.C. 6A:14) Readoption with Limited Amendments NJ State Special Education Advisory Council. Presentation was made available to members of the Council after the meeting.

Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director of Office of Special Education and Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director of Office of Special Education presented an Overview of NJDOE OSE Projects and Partnerships and provided a preview to the Mental Health Group’s Quick Guide. The overview was distributed to Council members after the meeting.

Mary Beth Berry questioned if the NJDOE was addressing dangers associated with virtual platforms and students and wondered if there was guidance on how students can be safe online. It seems that district policies try to focus on how to be safe and less on the dangers. Dr. Buxenbaum stated that districts should speak with their board attorneys regarding this issue as privacy laws come into play.

V. Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

VI. New Business

Needs members for the transition committee.

VII. Announcements

Barbara Gantwerk discussed that the PSA was partnering with the NJ PTA in an effort to address concerns of isolation issues that are arising from the virtual learning platform.

VIII. Public Comment

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

IX. Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:32 a.m.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for a virtual meeting Thursday, November 12, 2020.