

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Skype for Business

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 17, 2020

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

Members not in attendance: Chris Shamburg, Kerri Walsifer

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

Resource Representatives not in attendance: Dawn Mergen

Guests and members of the public: Kim Buxenbaum, Damian Petino, Kathy Goldenberg, Wendy Eufemia, Sol Heckelman, Lauren English-Mezzino, Matthew Korobkin

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 November Minutes

The November 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 the Community Based Instruction, NJPBS, and the Technical Assistance Series. The Community Based Instruction has been tweaked a bit due to the pandemic, and there will be more training opportunities for NJPBS in January 2021. A Virtual Town Hall was conducted by DCF and Perform Care on December 15, 2020. The event was maxed out at 500 attendees. Molly Green and staff provided a wealth of information. A second Town Hall event will be scheduled in January and announced through broadcasts and county offices. NJDOE continues to forge partnerships with sister agencies.

State Board Update provided by Kathy Goldenberg, President of the State Board of Education. President Goldenberg described the history of Social and Emotional Learning in the State of New Jersey. The NJDOE began its work around SEL in 2014 and in 2015 the School Climate Transformation Project was launched in conjunction with Rutgers. There were 45 project schools utilizing data and other information to improve school climate. The State Board of Education formed the SEL Committee in July of 2019, which is the same year the NJDOE hosted a conference with over 400 educators present. On National SEL Day in March of 2020, NJ had the highest participation of schools across the country. During COVID 19, one of the State BOE's and the NJDOE's biggest concerns continues to be the emotional wellbeing of adults and students. The state is seeing a comparison to after Hurricane Sandy in students with depression,

anxiety and a potential for an increase in suicide. NJDOE has provided resources to help districts with SEL concerns. “The Road Back” included SEL information for educators and the State recognizes the need for professional development. The first toolkit has been released and 5 additional toolkits that delve deeper into each SEL topic will be released. NJDOE is currently working to revise the NJ Climate Survey to include an online platform and to better align to include the competencies set forth in the National SEL Standards. The survey will be research based and in collaboration with Rutgers. The “Handle with Care” initiative is a statewide partnership with the Attorney General’s Office. Law enforcement makes a school aware of a traumatic event they responded to involving a student so the school can provide counseling and extra support to the student.

IV. Presentation

Wendy Eufemia, Coordinator of Deaf Education, Office of Special Education, presented on Deaf Education Bill of Rights and Communication Plan for DHH students.

Kim Buxenbaum commented that it is important not to over evaluate DHH students. There is a Transition Toolkit available on the DOE website for a checklist of skills and competencies for transitioning out of high school.

V. Old Business

None

VI. New Business

Council Member Pat White discussed the COVID 19 vaccine and suggested that the Council act as an advocate to the Department of Health for the special needs population as they are in the higher risk category. Dr. White was not advocating for or against the vaccine, simply suggesting the Council release a position statement as this population is often not the first considered.

Kim Buxenbaum stated that as DOH issues guidance, DOE has forwarded this information through broadcasts.

VII. Announcements

SPAN offering SRP – SPAN Resource Parent Training in January.

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, January 21, 2021.