

# **State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting**

## **Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, December 16, 2021**

**Members in attendance:** Paul Barbato, Debbie Esposito, Mark Brugger, Viviana Litovsky, Kristy Ritvalsky, Susan Vandermark, Lynda Shanahan, Andrea Moore, Kerri Walsifer

**Members not in attendance:** Chris Shamburg, Vikas Jain, Lonjete Nias, Patricia White

**Resource Representatives in attendance:** Toni Scott, Eva Scott, Kelley Michalowski,

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:** Donna Holzchuh, Dawn Mergen

**Guests and members of the public:** Damian Petino, Alexandra Pensiero, Ajaya Kumari, Fred Edora (IDC), Amy Bitterman (IDC), Jennifer Schaaf (IDC), Renee Eccckles-Hardy (IDC), Stefani Babits, Cary Kobylinski, Vanessa Schwippert, Mushana Dunham Bey, P.V., T.D., Beth Cosentino

**Stakeholders in attendance:** Julie Norflus-Good, Fred Buglione, Tracy Amerman, Lauren Agoratus, Corinne Catalano, Sol Heckelman, Michael Pearson, Sharon Lohrmann, Carolyn Marano, Lisa Ford, Sean Murphy, Debra Jennings

### **Call to Order**

Meeting called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:36am.

### **Acceptance of November Minutes**

November minutes were reviewed and were approved unanimously with no corrections.

### **Office of Special Education Updates**

Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director Office of Special Education, updated SSEAC members regarding the personnel additions at the Office of Special Education: Amanda Philp, new Autism Specialist, and Alexandra Pensiero, Federal Reporting Specialist/Stakeholder Engagement Specialist. The Office of Special Education has been addressing concerns from the field: staff shortages, substitute teacher usage, virtual learning concerns and remote instruction options due to outbreaks, mask mandates and implantation. Encouraging vigilance to ensure student and staff safety. 1<sup>st</sup> marking period feedback also being fielded by the Office: concerns about student achievement from teachers and amending IEP concerns from parents.

Two recent broadcasts to point out: December 1, 2021 broadcast with further information about S3434 compensatory services emphasizing the need for school districts to communicate with parents and to make sure it is clear what the plan is for the school year and the adult student. December 15, 2021 broadcast included information about the Be Smart Program. The Be Smart program is for parents who are concerned about gun safety. Be Smart offers short presentations about how to address gun safety with children and the mental health concerns surrounding the topic.

Training and Presentations: Kim Murray presented at the New Jersey School Board Association Special Education Committee. The Office hosted, in collaboration with Children's System of Care and New Jersey PerformCare, a virtual townhall geared towards educators with over 100 participants. ESSER roundtables have been offered for trainings and office hours to answer questions about funding. Wendy Eufemia hosted an uplifting day called "We Care" career day for deaf and hard of hearing students. January 26, 2022 is another ESSER roundtable presentation.

Dr. Paul Barbato commended Damian Petino for his presentation to the Bergen County Directors discussing the important initiatives of the state.

### **Presentation**

Fred Edora, Amy Bitterman, Jennifer Schaaf, and Renee Eccles-Hardy from the IDEA Database Center (IDC) presented to the SSEAC Council and Stakeholders. Topics of discussion included Reasonable Progress and Significant Disproportionality in Special Education. SSEAC Council Member and Stakeholders will be asked for their feedback regarding these topics during January's SSEAC meeting.

### **Council Discussion – New Business**

None

### **Old Business**

Kerri Walsfier and Patricia White subcommittee on how to increase representation of the special education population when considering virtual and hybrid options at the Department of Education level.

### **Announcements**

Debbie Esposito – SPAN Statewide Special Education Roundtables coming in February: February 7, 2022 at 7pm and February 9, 2022 at 10am.

Kerri Walsfier inquired about guidance coming from the NJDOE regarding staff shortages leading to timeline concerns surrounding evaluations and re-evaluations. Damian Petino stated that there has been no federal government flexibility due to COVID.

Sol Heckelman, New Jersey Association of School Psychologists, concerned about criteria for determining eligibility. Recognized that SLD is often misunderstood. NJASP offering 2-day workshops open to the public.

Damian Petino stated that the Mental Health Toolkit is with the Commissioner and Governor's Office for review. Once the document is approved, it will be released through a NJDOE broadcast.

### **Public Comment**

Mushana Dunham Bey spoke of concerns about the lack of communication from her district.

Beth Costentino spoke of poor communication from the district regarding staff shortages and not providing alternative options. Parents would appreciate more outreach from district.

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

### **Adjournment**

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:05am.