

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

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

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, March 18, 2021**

**Members in attendance:** Paul Barbato, Debbie Esposito, Mark Brugger, Vikas Jain, Viviana Litovsky, Lonjete Nias, Lynda Shanahan, Chris Shamburg, Kristy Ritvalsky, Susan Vandermark, Patricia White

**Members not in attendance:** Barbara Gantwerk, Andrea Moore, Kerri Walsifer

**Resource Representatives in attendance:** Donna Holzschuh, John Tkacz, Kelley Michalowski, Eva Scott, Rachel Ledden-Albadine

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:**

**Guests and members of the public:** Kim Buxenbaum, Dominic Rota, Damian Petino, Bill Freeman, Ajaya Katta, Padmaja Konuganti, Sol Heckelman, Maria Lorenz, Matthew Korobkin, Lauren Agoratus, Chastity Santana, Jeannie O'Neill, Theodore Fienberg, Danielle Fienberg, Antonia Vignola, Michelle (no last name)

**Stakeholders in attendance:** Julie Norflus-Good, Lisa Ford, John Lestino, Sean Murphy, Fred Buglione, Carolyn Marano, Deborah Spitalnik, Tracy Amerman, Patricia Dowd

### **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 February Minutes**

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

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

Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director Office of Special Education, welcomed everyone to the combined SSEAC and Stakeholder meeting. Application for ESSER 2 Funds released at beginning of week for the \$1.2 billion with over 90% allocated to the LEA's. There are 17 allowable uses the funds can be used for including mental health supports and services and learning loss. \$75 million specifically for learning acceleration with guidelines around how to be spent. Overall buckets are STEM, ELA, and the Visual Arts. More information will be disseminated as the DOE rolls out technical assistance training and will work with the County Offices to set a calendar for trainings across the field. \$30 million has been set aside for mental health. DOE felt it was very important to establish a minimum amount of monies to be put towards mental health; therefore, 97% of the districts will receive a minimum of \$45,000 that they will need to dedicate to mental health supports and services. Newark will receive close to \$200,000 as one of the largest districts in the state. This minimum was set to ensure that even the smallest districts had the funds to staff at least one part time person to provide mental health services. DOE has developed guidance around the tiered systems of supports to offer suggestions for different types of things they can

think about in the different tiers when completing the application process as it relates to mental health. Goal of the grant is to build sustainability for the programs being developed so the programs can continue after the life of the grant. 10% minimum of the funds district receive must be allocated towards professional development surrounding mental health. Dr. Buxenbaum thanked everyone at the DOE who has worked to get this application up for the districts to begin the process. March Inclusion Conference: Montclair State and New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education hosting which is March 19, 2021. Conference is open and free to administrators. June 28, 2021 is the Spring Conference. Shelly Moore and other national speakers will be present.

State Board Members not present at meeting.

#### **IV. Presentation**

Bill Freeman, CSPD Coordinator Office of Special Education, presented on Indicator 8 – Parent Involvement, and Indicator 14 – Post Secondary Transition Outcomes. Stakeholders were encouraged to discuss thoughts and provide feedback throughout the presentation. Presentation will be provided when approved by the Department.

The end of the presentation closed the Stakeholder meeting portion of the meeting.

#### **V. New Business**

Chris Shamburg – update surrounding Seclusion and Restraint Committee. Recommend looking at district wide policy's on implementing positive behavior intervention supports, use of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans and crisis plans, increasing verbal de-escalation practices, mental health services, anti-bullying and social problem solving and positive skills development programs, and clarifying the distinctions from other interventions such as timeouts and attention. The committee focused on recommendations for the Commissioner to consider on steps that can be taken to reduce the need of progressing to restraining a student. Mr. Shamburg asked that the SSEAC committee members review the letter once again for consideration. Draft letter to be distributed.

#### **VI. Old Business**

Debbie Esposito – SEPAG discussion. Parent involvement need to begin top down in most districts as districts need to embrace parents as partners. Districts can reach out to SPAN and the Star Project for guidance regarding starting and running a SEPAG. SPAN lists SEPAG groups by district and if a group is not listed, districts can reach out to SPAN to list the group. Debbie noted that it is important for districts to have SEPAG information on the district website. Dr. Barbato noted that it would be a good practice to discuss SEPAG at County meetings. The NJAC allows for flexibility for how SEPAG are organized and managed.

#### **VII. Announcements**

SPAN Parent Leadership and Advocacy Conference May 2021 – virtual. Sponsorship opportunities available. Reach out to Debbie Esposito. Great tools for parents to build leadership skills relating to their special needs student.

Transition sub-committee met this month – Lynda Shanahan, Mark Brugger, Sean Murphy, Darlene Tamara, Dr. Julie Noflus-Good, Somerlie McMan, and Bill Freeman. Exploring more person-centered practices and evidence-based research to provide to SSEAC and DOE.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services– John Tkacz noted that DVR has hired program planning and development specialist Toni Scott who will be overseeing pre-employment training services. DCR is also working on a summer internship program for students ages 16 and up until their senior year of high school. It will be a paid, work-based learning experience. More information to come.

### **VIII. Public Comment**

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

Dr. Barbato read a letter sent to SSEAC for public comment from Michelle Santos regarding co-taught classrooms. Dr. Barbato also read a letter from Maria Lorenz regarding learning loss due to COVID 19. Danielle Fienberg discussed concerns with Elizabeth school district.

### **IX. Adjournment**

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:34 a.m.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for a virtual meeting Thursday, April 15, 2021.