

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 20, 2021

Members in attendance: Paul Barbato, Debbie Esposito, Mark Brugger, Chris Shamburg, Kerri Walsifer, Susan Vandermark, Vikas Jain, Viviana Litovsky

Members not in attendance: Patricia White, Andrea Moore, Kristy Ritvalsky, Lynda Shanahan, Lonjete Nias

Resource Representatives in attendance: Kelley Michalowski, Eva Scott, Toni Scott, Rachel Ledden-Albadine

Resource Representatives not in attendance: Dawn Mergen, Patricia White, Andrea Moore

Guests and members of the public: Kim Buxenbaum, Dominic Rota, Damian Petino, Kim Murray, Chinwe Osondu, Keshia Trotman, Sol Heckelman, Lauren Agoratus, Tatiana Degrosa, Matthew Korobkin, Jeannie O'Neill

Stakeholders in attendance: Julie Norflus-Good, Sean Murphy, Fred Buglione, Carolyn Marano, Tracy Amerman, Patricia Dowd, Deborah Spitalnik, Katherine Solana, Lisa Ford, Gerard Thiers

Call to Order

Meeting called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:33am.

Acceptance of March and April Minutes

March and April minutes were reviewed and were approved unanimously with no corrections.

Office of Special Education Updates

Dr. Kim Buxenbaum, Director Office of Special Education, stated the Department has extended the application deadline for school districts to apply for ESSER II Funds to June 1, 2021. The Department has also received information from the Federal government regarding the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds and are working towards getting that information out to the school districts.

The Department is hosting a webinar the 1st week of June highlighting and celebrating school districts and the creative ways they have navigated 2020-2021 school year. More information to follow in a broadcast.

State Board of Education Update

State Board of Education members not present.

Presentation

Presentation – SPP/APR Changes to Indicators 4A, 4B, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16.

Kim Murray, Assistant Director Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution presented:

- Indicators 4A & 4B: Suspension/Expulsion
- Indicator 11: Child Find
- Indicator 12: Early Childhood Transition
- Indicator 13: Secondary Transition

Dominic Rota, Esq., Director Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution presented:

- Indicators 15 & 16: Resolution Sessions and Mediations. Also presented on Facilitated IEPs.

Council Discussion – New Business

Chris Shamburg – Restraint and Seclusion Letter. Council members will review letter once again for any edits and will revisit during June’s meeting. State and Federal legislations were discussed. Recommendation is for schools to focus on verbal de-escalation and mental health. Letter also discusses best practices.

Mark Brugger – IEP season currently and challenging for parents to prepare for meetings when not receiving reports and draft IEPs. There is a concern over pre-determination prior to the IEP meeting. Dr. Buxenbaum noted the importance of communication between the parties. Communication is key to a successful IEP meeting. Department stresses the importance of open communication between parties and reminds everyone that parents/guardians are key members of the team. Debbie Esposito – Mr. Brugger’s concerns are valid. Parents need to know what their interests are and be able to discuss those with the school district. Damian Petino discussed the Department’s IEP development training workshops geared more towards general education staff to understand the IEP and the law associated with students with special needs. Debbie Esposito noted SPAN trainings for parents and professionals relating to IEP development.

Dr. Paul Barbato – retirement of Barbara Gantwerk from SSEAC. Many members of DOE and SSEAC commented on Barbara’s knowledge, passion, and dedication to students with special needs.

Old Business

No old business discussed.

Announcements

Debbie Esposito - SPAN Parent Leadership and Advocacy Conference May 2021 – virtual. There were 200 attendees who participated and were involved in 20 break out groups. Debbie thanked several members of the Department who assisted with the Conference. Thanks to everyone who participated, it was productive and empowering for parents.

Public Comment

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

Maria Lorenz – expressed concerns regarding SEPAG in Elizabeth

Karen Strauss – expressed concerns regarding medically fragile students returning to buildings.

Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 10:56am.