

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

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

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, October 21, 2021**

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

**Members not in attendance:** Kerri Walsifer, Chris Shamburg

**Resource Representatives in attendance:** Eva Scott, Toni Scott, Brendan Myers, Kelley Michalowski, Donna Holzchuh

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:**

**Guests and members of the public:** Kim Murray, Damian Petino, Ilene Goy, Mary Haspel, Jenifer Spear, Bill Freeman, Brian Berry, Dolores Walther, Cindy Rimol, Mushana Dunham, Beth Cosentino, Angie Farrell

**Stakeholders in attendance:** Julie Norflus-Good, Sean Murphy, Fred Buglione, Tracy Amerman, Katherine Solana, John Lestino, Lauren Agoratus, Corinne Catalano, Sol Heckelman, Michael Pearson, Gerard Thiers, Emily Springle, Sharon Lohrmann

### **Call to Order**

Meeting called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:34am.

### **Acceptance of September Minutes**

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

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

Kim Murray, Acting Director Office of Special Education, updated SSEAC members regarding the reorganization of the Office of Special Education. There are 5 channels: Dispute Resolution, Policy & Regulations, Monitoring, LRCs, and Program Support. Personnel update – Erice Reid: Inclusion Specialist, Ilene Goy: Preschool Specialist, Mental Health Specialist starting in November 2021, Autism Specialist in November 2021, and Coordinator of Federal Reporting in December 2021. Ms. Murray announced the birth of Alexis Ziegler's son earlier in the week and congratulated the family.

As a policy update, Ms. Murray shared information about briefings that Kathy Ehling and herself have had with Governor Murphy and sister agency to give an overview of the work each agency does as it relates to children and adults with disabilities and the potential to work together to better support this population. Also bringing awareness to the Governor's Office of the issues the Office of Special Education manages for this population and how to better serve them.

Ms. Murray shared a new page on the NJDOE COVID website for mental health resources and support. Content on the page will be updated regularly.

Dr. Damian Petino provided a program update and highlighted the Program Specialist are out in the districts assisting those who have reached out for training. Wendy Eufemia is conducting CST Deaf Evaluation trainings, Bill Freeman is presenting at Autism New Jersey to discuss Pre-Employment Transition Services a joint presentation with the Department of Labor's Toni Scott, and a series of 12 ESSR 3 Webinars which is an outreach to all the NJ School districts providing the funding allocations encouraging district to review what they already have in place for mental health. Feedback has been great regarding all the outreach being provided by OSE. Next week, the Department and Office will be presenting at the NJSBA Conference.

### **State Board of Education Update**

No State Board Members present.

### **Presentation**

Kim Murray presented on SPP/APR Indicators 2, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, and 16 and working with Stakeholders to set targets. Immediately following the presentation, SSEAC and Stakeholders were assigned to breakout rooms to discuss the indicators and set targets through 2025. Feedback and suggestions will be discussed during the November SSEAC meeting.

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

Debbie Esposito shared that SPAN hosted their START roundtables with over 170 participants in 2 separate meetings. A great deal of information was shared about challenges still ongoing with SEPAGs. More guidance and compliance is still needed in many districts. A lot of variability throughout the state and feels more guidance is needed to address this variability.

Pat White agrees that there is no clarity regarding SEPAG, even in the best districts. More guidelines needed and meetings with parents and districts to assist with organizing and running SEPAGs. Outreach to districts either from SPAN or DOE would be beneficial to help set up and maintain SEPAGs. Possibly codification of SEPAG for more guidance.

Dr. Paul Barbato suggested a one-page documents with guidance for setting up and maintaining SEPAGs would be beneficial for districts as special education directors often change and this information is not passed to the new director. Ms. Esposito noted that there is all this information on SPAN's website. Dr. Barbato believes that it would be helpful if SEPAGs were a standing agenda item at County Meetings. Education Specialist of each County work with the directors to ensure this is in place and make sure they are aware that the support is available through SPAN. This would keep SEPAG on everyone's radar.

### **Old Business**

None

### **Announcements**

Debbie Esposito discussed SEPAG training taking place November 1 and 10, 2021. The training on November 10, 2021 will be offered in English and Spanish.

John Lestino with New Jersey Association of School Psychologists shared that their organization is attempting to put together a Learning Challenges Initiative. This is still in the birthing stage,

but working to produce a understanding of an updated view of learning disabilities along a more dimensional continuum rather than just a discrepancy continuum as is currently in code.

Sol Heckelman, New Jersey Association School Psychologist member, discussed the Semi-Annual Statewide Conference will be December 10, 2021. It will be virtual. Access is available through their website.

Dr. Damian Petino discussed the Department's partnership with Mental Health Technology Transfer Center conducting monthly webinars to support student and staff mental health and wellness throughout the year.

### **Public Comment**

Dr. Barbato read public comment from Mushanna Dunham regarding navigating due process as a pro se parent.

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 11:15am.