

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 23, 2021

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

Members not in attendance: Lynda Shanahan, Kerri Walsifer, Andrea Moore

Resource Representatives in attendance: Eva Scott, Toni Scott, Brendan Myers

Resource Representatives not in attendance: Kelley Michalowski, Donna Holzchuh

Guests and members of the public: Kathy Ehling, Kim Murray, Damian Petino, Alexis Ziegler, Keisha Trotman, Ariadis Rivera-Charles, Chinwe Osondu, Nicole Buten, Mary Beth Berry, Michele Russo Montgomery, Angie Farrell

Stakeholders in attendance: Julie Norflus-Good, Sean Murphy, Fred Buglione, Tracy Amerman, Deborah Lynam, Carolyn Marano, Kyoko Coco, Katherine Solana, John Lestino, Jennine O'Neill, Lauren Agoratus, Corinne Catalano, Sol Heckelman

Call to Order

Meeting called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:35am.

Acceptance of June Minutes

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

Office of Special Education Updates

Kim Murray, Acting Director Office of Special Education, discussed the reorganization of the Department of Education which was approved during the September State Board of Education meeting. The reorganization of the Department will streamline the Department. The new Division new is the Division of Educational Services lead by Assistant Commissioner Kathy Ehling. The reorganization of the Division consolidated the Office of Special Education Program and the Office of Special Education Policy and Dispute Resolution into one Office – the Office of Special Education. The Office will be split into two leadership teams: Program lead by Dr. Damian Petino and Policy lead by Dominic Rota. Kim Murray provided a brief overview of her background as a Special Education teacher in Philadelphia and her career with NJDOE which included complaint investigator, monitor, statewide assessment, disproportionality and equity, manager, and assistant director. OSE working on building capacity of office by hiring inclusion specialist, 2nd preschool specialist, a mental health specialist, a coordinator of federal reporting. Working to bring on an additional transition specialist, someone with a speech language background, and someone with experience with significant intellectual disabilities.

Kim Murray also shared parental concerns with virtual learning which were fielded throughout the summer along with mask concerns and program and placement issues. Transportation

continues to be a struggle for districts and a concern for parents with transportation as part of their student's IEP.

Dr. Damian Petino congratulated Kim Murray as new leader of the Office of Special Education along with Kathy Ehling as the Assistant Commissioner for the Division. Damian expressed his excitement regarding the new hires that will soon be joining the Office. Biggest program announcement is the renewal of the MOU with the Boggs Center at Rutgers University. Boggs Center runs three programs which are integral and important to the work the Office does around inclusion: New Jersey Positive Behavior and Supports in Schools, Community Based Instruction, and Person Centered Approaches School and Transition. The Mental Health Resource Manual is very close to being complete. It is 11 chapters with over 300 pages. It is a very comprehensive guide. Monthly webinars will be offered to support the release of the document and to support districts that have been accessing ESSR funds throughout the year with a focus on mental health. The Office is entering a new school year with energy and enthusiasm and looking forward to all the good things to come.

State Board of Education Update

Mary Beth Berry provided an update for the State of Board of Education. State Board September meeting minutes are available online for public viewing. One piece to mention to SSEAC is the temporary rule modification that was adopted on April 1 which permitted special education instruction to be conducted through virtual platforms along with related services to be provided through telehealth and online platforms. It was requested during the September State Board Meeting to allow the continuation of providing related services virtually until January 5, 2022.

Debbie Esposito provided feedback from parents who have contacted SPAN. Transportation is a huge concern for parents with students with IEPs. Parents are being asked to provide their own transportation as districts are unable to provide the transportation due to lack of drivers and aides. Many parents are unable to provide transportation therefore, students are not receiving educational services. SPAN is providing these families with information on conflict resolution. SPAN has received feedback regarding the online instruction when they need to quarantine. Parents are concerned that this year the online instruction isn't as robust as last year. In addition, those students who are immunocompromised as being told they can be provided with home instruction. Staff shortages are affecting all aspects of education across the board. Schools are asking for more guidance regarding virtual instruction during quarantine.

Presentation

Presentation – State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)/ State-Identified Measurable Results (SiMR) Kathy Ehling, Assistant Commissioner, Division of Student Services, Kim Murray, Acting Director, Office of Special Education, and Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director, Office of Special Education. Immediately following the presentation, members of the NJDOE lead Breakroom Room Discussions with SSEAC Council Members and Stakeholders. Feedback was collected.

Council Discussion – New Business

Debbie Esposito and Chris Shamburg discussed the SEPAG Subcommittee which was formed at the last SSEAC meeting. The Subcommittee met over the summer in response to concerns about SEPAG in districts. The subcommittee developed ideas to lift up and support SEPAGs across the state. Some action items resulting from their meetings included updating the SSEAC website to

include the Restraint and Seclusion letter, dyslexia information, and sign language letter. Networking opportunities need to be utilized to bring together SEPAGs across the state along with parents and professionals. Utilize the SSEAC website more and utilize the current tools to support SEPAGs in the districts.

Mark Brugger – S3434 early feedback receiving is that there is an opportunity for the 8700 special education students who could benefit from the bill. There has not been much guidance and Mark is concerned that the law has created more concerns than intended. Wants to ensure that all students get what they need prior to their transition to adulthood. Is meeting with NJDOE next week to discuss his concerns.

Mary Beth Berry asked Dr. Petino about the status of the Work Based Learning Manual. Specifically, districts are seeking guidance on insurance. Damian will follow up.

Old Business

None

Announcements

Debbie Esposito - SPAN Parent Leadership Conferences scheduled for October 7-9, 2021.

Mark Brugger – LDA NJ and LDA MI hosting Linking Information about LD on October 15 and 16, 2021. It is a 2-day virtual conference for parents, administrators, educators, advocates, professional, students, and all others who want to learn more about learning disabilities.

Mary Beth Berry inquired about Dare to Dream. Some dates have been set and a broadcast memo was sent out.

Kim Murray – DOE Broadcast issued today regarding Youth Transition Conference. There are 2 tracks – one for professionals and one for youth and family. Registration open. Events take place October 1 and 2, 2021.

Public Comment

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

Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:37am.