

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 17th, 2022

Members in attendance: Vivian Litovsky, Paul Barbato, Kerri Walsifer, Vikas Jain, Lynda Shanahan, Andrea Moore, Debbie Esposito

Members not in attendance: Mark Brugger, Kristy Ritvalsky, Chris Shamburg, Pat White, Susan Vandermark

Resource Representatives in attendance: Eva Scott (DHS), Moises Williams (DOH), Thomas Zobebe (DOL), Kelley Michaloweski (DCF), Donna Holzschuh (JJC), John Tkacz (DOL)

Resource Representatives not in attendance: *All resource representatives were present*

Guests and members of the public: Alexandra Pensiero, Catherine Anthony, Chinwe Osondu, Damian Petino, Maurice Ingram, Norwood (sepag), Theresa Maughan, Bill Freeman, Camy Kobylinski, Jenn Horne, MD, Amanda Philp, Erice Reid, two undetermined mobile participants

Stakeholders in attendance: Sean Murphy, Beth Cosentino, Carolyn Marano, Michael Pearson Jr., Fred Buglione, Sol Heckelmann, Tonya Hardin Santos, Kathy Goldenberg, Julie Norflus-Good, Lauren Agortus

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:36 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

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

Office of Special Education Updates

Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director, updated SSEAC members on several items pertaining to the Office of Special Education.

The Office of Special Education has been expanding into developing new positions, including Deaf Education Consultant, Speech-Language Specialist, Significant Disabilities Specialist, Policy Coordinator, Special Education Monitor, and Coordinator of Dispute Resolution. Once the postings close, the next step will be interviewing potential candidates.

The Office of Special Education has been fielding and addressing concerns from the counties and districts regarding the impact of the recent removal of the Public Health Emergency and the provision of related services remotely.

There has been a successful launch of the first edition of the Office of Special Education Newsletter, "*Special Education in Action*". The newsletter will be released quarterly, highlighting district or school-based programs, and including links to important resources and opportunities.

A recent broadcast had been released:

- February 23rd, 2022: Senate Bill 3726 concerning school security drills.
 - It includes a requirement that “Security drills must be ‘...accessible to students with disabilities and mental health conditions and provides all necessary accommodations for these students.’”
 - Public comment was made about compensatory education. The public comment resulted in sharing the most recent broadcast and guidance around compensatory education. *Note: Comments should take place during the public comment portion of the meeting.*

Training and Presentations:

Dr. Damian Petino presented the following upcoming trainings:

- March 29th: Conducting CST Evaluations for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- April 5th: An Introduction to Creating Trauma-Informed Learning Environments

In April, the Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) will be working with SSEAC to develop and approve by-laws that will go into effect in September of 2022. This will be a closed meeting.

Presentation

Dr. Maurice Ingram, Mental Health Specialist from the Office of Student Services, presented on the newly released *New Jersey Comprehensive School-Based Mental Health Resource Guide*.

Council Discussion –

New Business

Amanda Philp, Autism Specialist from the Office of Special Education, presented on the intention to update the 2004 Autism Program Quality Indicators (APQIs). She is seeking an Autism Advisory Panel that would assist in the development and feedback of a revised document that will include new research and literature and target a larger grade span. She proposed a subcommittee meeting following the conclusion of the council meeting.

Kerri Walsifer updated the group on a proposed letter that she is drafting with Dr. Patricia White. The nature of the letter is a thank you to the department for ongoing support and a request for inclusion of the advisory council in future topics around meeting the needs of student with disabilities.

Lynda Shanahan updated the council that the transition subcommittee met for the first time. They are working under the guidance of Bill Freeman, Transition Specialist at the Office of Special Education. She is requesting the participation of additional council members involvement. She also announced additional transition focused opportunities, including:

- March 25th - Facing the Future Conference

- April 22nd - Learning Disability Association Life in High School and Beyond Virtual Conference

Old Business

There were no Old Business items presented.

Announcements

Alexandra Pensiero, The Office of Special Education's Federal Reporting and Engagement Specialist, identified that the SSEAC application period has closed. The applications will be reviewed, and applicants will be interviewed as needed. The recommendations will be made to the Assistant Commissioner and Commissioner by May and will submit for June's state board meeting for approval.

Debbie Esposito announced that the State Parent Advisory Network (SPAN) is having an event on March 21st and 22nd for an Overview of Rights for Parents. This event will be presented in both English and Spanish. Additionally, she noted to look out for a save the date for May for the 3rd statewide family round table. Last round table, there were over 200 participants. She requested more SSEAC members participate in these events.

Public Comment

Sol Hecklemann announced New Jersey Association for School Psychologists are having "deep-dive training" sessions for students with learning disabilities and learning loss. These trainings address the process of determining eligibility explicitly. There are four two-hour segments. To participate in any upcoming sessions, please get in touch with him via email.

MD, a public guest, shared her concerns regarding her three children who have special education needs. She is "struggling" to connect with her district and "find her voice". She has been in due process. She has not had resolution to date. Additionally, she expressed her son with autism is struggling. She feels hopeless. She feels that her child is being failed. She prefers not to put her name on class action suits and needs relief now.

- The chairperson responded that someone from the office of Special Education would be in touch with her. She was also directed to email SPEDadvisorycouncil@doe.nj.gov.
- The assistant chair, Debbie Esposito, also emphasized roundtables with SPAN. These roundtables would address new targeted audiences and educational professionals. The event will commence on March 29th. She put the flyer in the chat. She also highlighted grant opportunities available for districts through a multi-tiered system of support and the importance of family engagement to support these frameworks.

New Jersey Education Association, Camy Kobylinski, announced the *Expectational Children Conference* on April 30th. She put the link to the registration in the chat. SSEAC council member, Debbie Esposito, will be presenting. There are 18 intended mini-sessions, and current enrollment is low.

Norwood (SEPAG), Jenny, requested more guidance from the state on SEPAG monitoring and procedure. It is said to be parent-led, but the districts are controlling it. She feels guidance is really vague, and the districts are saying no to bringing in "experts", and they are preferring to

have their staff present. She doesn't know what to do and requests more guidance on SEPAG operations.

- The chairperson responded that someone from the office of Special Education would be in touch with her.
- Alexandra Pensiero requested Jenny to email the SPEDAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov regarding these concerns.
- Lauren Agortus shared the START information on SEPAGs for guidance in the chat.

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

Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 10:44 a.m.