

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 13th, 2023

Members (in attendance): Dr. Paul Barbato, Elizabeth Alves, John Worthington, Dr. Dorothy McMullen, Jocelyn Gottlieb, Cynthia Defina, Peggy McDonald, Debbie Esposito, Scott Longazel, Dr. Carmen Henderson, Dr. Eniola Ajayi, Dr. Lottie Watson, Dr. Pamela Brillante, Dr. Jennifer Vecchiarelli

Members (not in attendance): Dr. Harold Abraham

Resource Representatives (in attendance): Eva Scott (CBVI), Daniel Heitner (DOH), Toni Scott (DOL), Donna Holzschuh (JJC), Tamira Chapman (McKinney-Vento),

Resource Representatives (not in attendance): Tauheedah Hill (DOC)

Proxy Representatives (in attendance): Lori Alter, Rafeeza Shahabudeen, Jennifer Kaufman

Proxy Representatives (not in attendance): *Proxy Representatives were in attendance.*

Guests from the NJ Department of Education (in attendance): Kimberly Murray, Dr. Damian Petino, Ilene Goy, Erice Reid, Dr. Chinwe Osondu, Dr. Amanda Philp, Alexandra Pensiero, Jeanne Weaver, Jill Trainor

Stakeholders and Members of the Public (in attendance): Jennifer Steffich, Barbara Bole Williams, Debi Vesper, Jamie Zibulsky, Lauren Agoratus, David Nash, Jessica Smedley, Karen Bennett, Ann Murphy, Kristy Ritvalsky, Michael Tozzoli, Trainor, Jill, Narmene Hamsho, Mushana K Dunham Bey, Aviva Gans, Harry Humphrey, Anjali Viswanath, Lisa Ford, Amy Accardo, Brie Morettini, Jenny Murphy, Matthew Korobkin, Kristen Jandoli, Katie Delaney, Beth Cosentino, Luke Babits, Sonya Bertini

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:30 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

March minutes were reviewed and were approved unanimously with one attendance correction.

Presentation(s)

Office of Special Education Updates

Kimberly Murray, Director for the Office of Special Education, updated SSEAC members on several items pertaining to the Office of Special Education.

Newsletter District Spotlight Presentation

Jennifer Steffich, Director of Special Services from Manasquan School District, presented on Manasquan High School's 18-21 year-old program following the release of the Office of Special

Education's 3rd newsletter titled: "Small Town, Big Impact: The Center for Learning and Independence (CLI)". The presentation was followed by a Q&A with council members

Council Priority in Focus: Mental Health and Students with Disabilities

Presentation

"Addressing Mental Health in Schools: The Power of Partnerships" followed by a Q&A

- Presenter: Michael J. Tozzoli, MSW, LCSW, Chief Executive Officer of West Bergen Mental Healthcare

Panel Discussion

The Mental Health subcommittee requested a panel discussion as part of their work study around NJ-SSEAC's mental health priority. The subcommittee members provided a list of recommended participants from various organizations and perspectives. The Office of Special Education assisted in the development and facilitation of this panel discussion to fulfill this request. The list of questions provided by the council and subcommittee members, under the leadership of Dr. Cynthia Defina, are listed below. This includes details of the panelists that participated during this section of the agenda.

Panel Participants and Representing Organizations/Perspectives

- New Jersey Association of School Social Workers: Dawn Di Nardo-Lippi, NJASSW Director of Programs, School Social Worker
- Institute of Higher Education: Dr. Jamie Zibulsky, Director, and Dr. Narmene Hamsho, Professor at the School Psychology Program at Fairleigh Dickinson University
- New Jersey Association of School Psychology: Dr. Barbara Bole Williams, Professor at Rowan University, Chair of the Professional Standards Committee for NJASP: Ethics, Certification and Professional Standards
- Special Education Supervisor/Director: Debi Vesper, Supervisor of Special Education, Facilitator for the development of the "Collingswood Wellness Center:
- SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (PTI): Lauren Agoratus, State Coordinator for Family Voices NJ at the SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
- New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association: David Nash, Director of Legal Education and National Outreach, and Jessica Smedley, Director of Counseling
- Rutgers Center for Comprehensive School Mental Health: Kristy Ritvalsky, Senior Training and Consultation Specialist
- Principal: Dr. Karen Beckford-Bennett, Principal, Commissioner for the Bergen County Human Relations Commission, and Vice President of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association

Questions used for the Panel Discussion (facilitated by the subcommittee members). Each panelist also did a brief introduction before responding to the first question.

- What current initiatives and evidenced-based practices do you have experience in? How can these efforts be duplicated in other educational agencies?
- What barriers have you faced and how did you overcome them?
- When it comes to psychiatric clearances for students with disabilities, what are the gaps in strategies and supports at the district/community level?
- How have you approached work with administration to ensure equity for students with disabilities?
- What data do you feel is important to inform changes at the school level? What information is not collected but should be considered when designing and addressing this work?
- How can we connect and support families to ensure they have resources necessary to support students with disabilities' mental health? From your experience, what strategies and approaches have been most impactful?
- As a parent, what are your expectations of a school district when a student with disabilities has exhibited behaviors that could potentially be a danger to themselves or others?
- What other evidence-based practices do you feel are instrumental in developing school-based programs and supports for students with disabilities?

Council Discussion –

Old Business

Dr. Paul Barbato reminded NJ-SSEAC members about their attendance as reflected under the most recent approved by-laws.

Alexandra Pensiero, Council Ad Hoc, addressed the council reminding them to complete the annual survey for council members. At the time of the meeting she had received 15 responses (about 75% response rate).

New Business

Dr. Paul Barbato read aloud the first new business item from the agenda. He reported that the June NJ-SSEAC meeting will be held as a hybrid event at the LRC Central in Trenton, New Jersey. The event space holds up to 55 people. Council members will have first right to attendance. *Access to the location and virtual links will be posted on the NJ-SSEAC webpage.*

Alexandra Pensiero, Council Ad Hoc, addressed the council by reminding them of the responsibility to present on June 8th at the final NJ-SSEAC meeting on an overview of their council activities for the year and any recommendations for the following council year, including the expansion of the priorities or recommended action plans.

Announcements

A review of the stakeholder event announcements were read allowed by Dr. Paul Barbato, Council Chairperson, from the agenda.

Public Comment

The chairperson, Dr. Paul Barbato, verbally recited excerpts from the NJ-SSEAC bylaws regarding public comment procedures. He identified the council would not comment during the public portion of the meeting. However, he reported that comments, concerns and recommendations were to inform current and future work of the council.

Sonya Bertini had provided an email to SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov. She decided to speak publicly as a follow-up to her email. Her public comment was in regard to multilingual learners and concerns regarding their services and accommodations on testing and exit from ELL testing.

A parent had emailed SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov. She was not present to read her email or speak publicly so the chairperson read her email aloud. The nature of her public comment was that she had previously come to these meetings to speak on concerns about individual districts but after observing today's public meeting, she was pleased to see all of the innovative projects and supports, especially in the area of mental health, that were happening across the state.

The chairperson invited all public participants to provide further correspondence via email, if they had not done so already. Dr. Barbato concluded to all participants that following written receipt, someone from the Office of Special Education would be in contact with them. Public comments and questions can be submitted to SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov.

Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 1:04 p.m.