

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 19th, 2023

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

Members (not in attendance): Dr. Carmen Henderson, Dr. Lottie Watson

Resource Representatives (in attendance): Eva Scott (CBVI), Daniel Heitner (DOH), Kelley Michalowski (DCF), Toni Scott (DOL), Donna Holzschuh (JJC), Lisa Murray (McKinney-Vento), Tamira Chapmen (McKinney-Vento), Pheobie Thomas (McKinney-Vento)

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

Proxy Representatives (in attendance): Lori Alter

Proxy Representatives (not in attendance): Rafeeza Shahabudeen, Jennifer Kaufman

Guests from the NJ Department of Education (in attendance): Kathy Goldenberg, Kimberly Murray, Dr. Damian Petino, Ilene Goy, Erice Reid, Dr. Chinwe Osondu, Dr. Amanda Philp, Wendy Eufemia, Alexandra Pensiero

Stakeholders and Members of the Public (in attendance): Fred Buglione, Julie Norflus-Good, Lauren Agoratus, Y Paz, Mushana K Dunham Bey, Aviva, Harry Humphrey, Like Babits, Anjali Viswanath

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:03 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

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

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.

There were three highlights presented:

- The planning of two (2) new Communities of Practice (CoPs) for:
 - Transition (18-21) years of age
 - Speech-Language Specialists
- The release of the 5th issue of the Special Education in Action newsletter

The Office of Special Education has several personnel updates including the start of a new Preschool Coordinator on December 5th, the nomination of a Special Education Monitor and two

(2) Assistant Directors, and the approval of a Regulatory Officer. The Office of Special Education is currently in the process of interviewing for two (2) new Complaint Investigators.

Kim Murray gave updates around “Programs and Projects” for the Office of Special Education and the Department of Education:

- A \$14 million Federal Grant was awarded to the NJDOE to support youth mental health efforts. This is a five-year grant that expands the number of psychologists, counselors, and social workers in New Jersey schools with the greatest need.
- New Jersey Partnership for Student Success (NJPSS) is a department-wide initiative.
 - Pillars: Learning Acceleration, Student Mental Health, Universal Preschool, Educator Empowerment
 - The Office of Special Education (OSE) is holding the NJPSS Summer Learning Institute
 - Held at the LRC-Central in Trenton
 - In-person and hybrid professional development during the months of July and August
 - Informal office hours and presentations conducted by the OSE Program Specialist

Kim Murray brought the attention of the meeting to a few recent broadcasts, including:

- December 14th: Providing Additional or Compensatory Services to Students with Disabilities Beyond Age 21 and Addressing Compensatory Services in the Individualized Education Program
- December 14th: Mandatory Restraint and Seclusion Data/Collection/Student Safety Data System
- January 11th: The United State Office of Special Education Programs (USOSEP) released three pieces of discipline guidance on the protections afforded to students with disabilities
 - These documents address the concept of informal removals: “Informal removals are subject to IDEA’s requirements to the same extent as disciplinary removals by school personnel using the school’s disciplinary procedures.”

Kim Murray concluded with various training opportunities from the NJDOE as part of the calendar of events. The trainings would occur on January 25th, 2023, including:

- ARP ESSER Round Table: Strategies on Maximizing Federal Funds
- Developing and Refining Tier 2 & 3 Interventions

Council Engagement following the Director’s Presentation

Debbie Esposito, Council Assistant Chairperson, inquired about the aggregation of the data collected around restraint and seclusion.

- Kim Murray, Director, responded that she was not yet advised on the reporting practices but would inquire with those responsible for the collection of the school safety data additions on reporting practices.

Peggy McDonald praised the award notification and inquired about the dissemination of the funding for the \$14 million dollar mental health grant.

- Alexandra Pensiero and Dr. Damian Petino advised that this would be a subgrant award process. However, determination of allocations to each of those awardees has not yet been announced.

Scott Longazel requested guidance and clarification regarding the dissemination and notification for parents and families around informal removals and discipline. He indicated that they trust experts in administration but do not feel they are clear on the provisions within these regulations.

- Kim Murray responded that she is aware that these regulations are complicated. She is determining an approach to support district personnel with a website and training regarding discipline practices, procedures and regulations.

Presentation(s)

Office of Special Education Initiative and Promising Practices – “SSIP & Implementation Science: Improving Student Learning Outcomes”

- Presenter: Erice Reid, Inclusion Specialist and Dr. Damian Petino, Assistant Director, Office of Special Education

Council Discussion –

Old Business

Alexandra Pensiero, Council Ad Hoc, addressed the establishment of three-priority areas, determined by appointed and resource advisory members, including:

- Priority I: Mental Health and Students with Disabilities
- Priority II: Least Restrictive Environment
- Priority III: Recruitment and Retention

New Business

Dr. Paul Barbato called upon council subcommittee members to report on their subcommittee activities from the month of December and/or January:

- *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*
 - Issues discussed/reported during their subcommittee meeting:
 - As a state, New Jersey is ranked 50th in the country related to the 80% or more placement category.

- Questions proposed by subcommittee to guide future discussions:
 - What is driving this ranking?
 - How can we look at the quality of data being collected?
 - What data is being used to drive our “low ranking”?
 - What are the circumstances, including the robust group of out-of-district programs that New Jersey has, that impact our LRE determination?
 - Where are we excelling that may not be reflected in the LRE calculation?
- Actionable activities for follow-up within the subcommittee:
 - Looking at the continuum of services from preschool through transition
 - Potential engagement opportunities:
 - The SWIFT Center and NJCIE for technical assistance, support and resources
 - Consideration to connect with other council priorities
 - e.g., Recruitment and Retention
 - What is the preparation look like for inclusive practices at the teacher entry level?
 - Inquire with the Office of Standards (NJDOE) for prerequisite skills that impact access for students with disabilities
- *Recruitment and Retention*
 - Issues discussed/reported during their subcommittee meeting:
 - There is a lack of candidates
 - The comparison between the Teacher of Students with Disabilities (TOSD) and Teachers of Handicap (TOH)
 - Consider the implications on access to teach specific grade levels (i.e. middle school)
 - They identified the difficulties of Alternate Route for Special Education. It was reported to be especially cumbersome who are not certified already
 - Specialty Endorsements (such as Teacher of Deaf or Hard of Hearing): There are no programs within the state for these specialty certifications. Those that receive out-of-state certification, have difficulty transferring to the requirements set forth within New Jersey.
 - Higher Education and Teacher Preparation: shortcuts in the program and requirement to complete within the four-years
 - Questions: Are we really preparing teachers? Could this impact retention?
 - Actionable activities for follow-up within the subcommittee:
 - Inquire about the opportunity to align and/or engage with the Governor’s Task Force to address teacher shortages
 - Retrieve data regarding vacancies and/or expected vacancies (including leaves and retirements)
- *External Engagement*
 - Focus:

- How can we engage with stakeholder groups outside of the State Department?
 - How can we create a repository of external engagement stakeholders?
 - Actionable steps:
 - Review the list and add groups missing from the general stakeholder list
 - Provide ongoing support to other priorities
 - Connection with priorities to facilitate planning and recommendations to connect with various stakeholder groups
 - Determine a flow chart for collaboration
 - Using public comment and determining effective ways to disseminate information with external stakeholder groups
- *Internal Engagement*
 - Focus:
 - Determine a process for internal engagement and flow/relation to other divisions/offices that may be of future support for council activities
 - Questions
 - How do we address the absenteeism?
 - Can we alternate between in-person vs. virtual meetings in the future?
- *Mental Health*
 - Key Issues:
 - What is the role of the district to address mental health in schools?
 - What is the role of the NJ4S Legislation on schools and staff?
 - How do we address these areas of focus/need without funding?
 - Guidance is needed (example: students who are not available to learn because of mental and emotional capacity)
 - What is the data to quantify the mental health needs?
 - Engagement Opportunities and Resources:
 - Wrap-around services: model and clear collaboration with CMO/Care Managers for Students (Bergen County – Educational Care Manager)
 - Representative from the Office of Student Support Services
 - State representative to present on the NJ4S from the Division of Children and Families

Announcements

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

- NJCEC Spring 2023 Conference, “Embracing the Whole Child” on March 13th, 2023 from 8am to 3pm at Ramapo College of New Jersey
- Monmouth University’s Special Services Professional Development Academy for 2022-2023
 - For more information on the SSA or BCBA Roundtable workshop series, please email: soessa@monmouth.edu.
- NJ Center for Tourette Syndrome & Associated Disorders

- <https://njcts.org/calendar/upcoming-events>
- The Arc of New Jersey Family Institute hosts “Monday’s with Michael” on Facebook Live
- The Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) of Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ) is hosting a:
 - Least Restrictive Environment Conference in March and a two day-course on the use of a Pragmatic Organization of Dynamic Display (PODD)
 - ATAC is pleased to provide complimentary unlimited access to the ATIA Learning Center

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.

A parent, Ms. Dunham Bey, sent in an email but was not present for public comment. Her email was read aloud by Dr. Barbato, Council Chairperson: “Good morning. I will attempt to attend the meeting to speak. If not, please read below for the record: I want to urge this council to looking deeply into transition services, support and plans, especially in Title I schools. It is disheartening to constantly see statistics in College Readiness being low in these districts or to know that students are graduating without the skills and tools needed for success.”

Ms. Lauren Agoratus, stakeholder from SPAN, made a public comment regarding mental health issues. She wanted to inform the council of the misuse of psychiatric clearances. She reported that schools are using them for average autistic meltdowns (not a mental health crisis). Further, it is unclear who bears the cost (school or family) and what the criteria for clearance is as many districts are requesting multiple clearances for the same instance. We would hope that the Department could issue guidance on this. Additionally, Ms. Agoratus reported, now that there will be data collection on both restraints and seclusion, she hopes that the Department will look for areas of systemic improvement in districts, such as the use of PBIS. Finally, it was reported that SPAN is concerned that the 988 hotline (per orientation session) will be reporting children to police rather than mobile response which subjects students unnecessarily to juvenile justice rather than getting help. She identified that she serves on the local NAMI Board, SERV Behavioral Health Family Advisory Council, and PerformCare Parent Leader Workgroup. She has also made them aware of these issues. She extended an appreciation for the council’s time consideration and attention.

- 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 11:36 a.m.