

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 16th, 2023

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

Members (not in attendance): Dr. Lottie Watson

Resource Representatives (in attendance): Eva Scott (CBVI), Daniel Heitner (DOH), Kelley Michalowski (DCF), Toni Scott (DOL), Donna Holzschuh (JJC), Pheobie Thomas (McKinney-Vento), James Boyd (JJC), Martha Castro (JJC)

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): Kathy Goldenberg, Mary Beth Berry, Kimberly Murray, Dr. Damian Petino, Luiz Pereira, Kelly Allen, Ilene Goy, Erice Reid, Dr. Chinwe Osondu, Dr. Amanda Philp, Bill Freeman, JoAnn Johnson, Alexandra Pensiero

Stakeholders and Members of the Public (in attendance): Fred Buglione, John Lestino, Julie Norflus-Good, Lauren Agoratus, Mushana K Dunham Bey, Aviva Gans, Harry Humphrey, Anjali Viswanath, Lisa Ford, Amy Accardo, Brie Morettini, Jenny Murphy, Matthew Korobkin, Kristen Jandoli, Katie Delaney, Wendy Sage, Beth Cosentino, Luke Babits, Daphna El-Roy

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:31 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

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

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.

Council Priority in Focus: Mental Health and Students with Disabilities

Council Priority Engagement - “*New Jersey Department of Education’s Focus on Mental Health*” followed by a Q&A

- Presenters: Mr. Luiz Periera, Director, and Ms. Kelly Allen, Manager, from the Office of Student Support Services

Office of Special Education Promising Practices and Considerations - “Transition Planning Services and the Impact of Mental Health”

- Presenter: Mrs. JoAnn Johnson, Transition Specialist, Office of Special Education

Council Discussion –

Old Business

Alexandra Pensiero, Council Ad Hoc, addressed the subcommittee by reporting:

- There would be March subcommittee breakout sessions following the monthly NJ-SSEAC meeting.
- Two surveys will be sent to SSEAC members that are requested to be completed by March 31st

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.

Dr. Paul Barbato called upon council subcommittee members to report on their subcommittee activities from the month of February/March:

- *Mental Health and Students with Disabilities:* They reported that they are currently working on developing specific questions around what supports are like, what would the new NJ4S offer to students and start thinking more about data to pull to enrich their discussions. They also look forward to merging the presentations from today into their discussions moving forward.
- *Least Restrictive Environment:* The LRE subcommittee met and determined they would like to review the indicator data that is collected from school districts. The data would allow them to see which districts are having difficulty with LRE and then make some specific recommendations on how to assist. This includes what is preventing them from having more inclusive environments and what is keeping their removal percentage rates at a high-level. They requested that someone assist them in extracting this data and making sense of the percentages.

- *Recruitment and Retention:* They reviewed the recent document from the Governor's staff shortage recommendation document. They are continuing to evaluate and analyze the report and will be providing more feedback at the next meeting.
- *External Engagement:* It was reported that they met in early March to focus on how they can create better channels of communication. They also want to build a platform for a stronger parent voice. They would like to also find a way to identify trends at the district level and leverage existing roundtables to make this happen. Additionally, they are reviewing the external stakeholder list and tagging groups that could connect with the different subcommittees and priorities. They are working to group the specific representative groups and drafting a specific set of guidelines for communication flow.
- *Internal Engagement:* They do not have a formal update. They did collect some information about the internal workings of the NJDOE. Including where various office's fall, their responsibilities and specific priorities related to those offices.

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.

A parent from Haddon Township School District had provided an email to SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov. This email was read aloud by the Council Chairperson. The nature of the email was on the parent engagement activities for the district Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG) and the protections that exist for parents who file a special education complaint.

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.