

State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting

Virtual Meeting Conducted Utilizing Microsoft Teams

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 17th, 2022

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

Members (not in attendance): *All appointed council members were in attendance.*

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

Resource Representatives (not in attendance): *All resource members were in attendance.*

Proxy Representatives (in attendance): Jen Kaufman, Lori Alter

Proxy Representatives (not in attendance): Rafeeza Shahabudeen

Guests from the NJ Department of Education (in attendance): Ilene Goy, Erice Reid, Kimberly Murray, Amanda Philp, Yasmin Rodriguez-Burrell, Ariadis Rivera-Charles, Nicole Buten, Wendy Eufemia, Damian Petino, Alexandra Pensiero

Stakeholders and Members of the Public (in attendance): Jessica Neu, Fred Buglione, Deborah Spitalnik, Julie Norflus-Good, Lauren Agoratus, Beth Cosentino, Michael Pearson, Sol, Carolyn Hayer, Mushana Dunham Bey, Tracy Amerman, "CL", Christina Lavell, Maria, Christina Moreira, Michelle Santos, Harry Humphrey, Luann Breese, Anjali Viswanath, Ethan Yoo, Joseph Hogan, Karen Bingert, Daphna El-Roy, Dale Webber, Naomi Leibowitz, Karen Bingert, Aviva, Mike Marotta, Christina Rangel, Luann Breese

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:01 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

There were no minutes for review or approval.

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.

The Office of Special Education has nominated three final candidates for the following positions: Deaf Education Consultant, Transition Specialist, and Complaint Coordinator. Several positions are in the process of onboarding, including the Preschool Coordinator who starts December 5th

and nominations for the following positions: Special Education Monitor, Regulatory Officer, Complaint Investigator (x2).

There were no recent broadcasts identified as a 'recent release' during the updates.

Kim Murray gave updates around “Highlights” for the Office of Special Education. They included:

- Meeting Requirements on the SPP/APR
- The launch of the new OSE website
- Release of the 4th issue for the *OSE in Action* newsletter

Kim Murray concluded with presenting information and data around her three priorities for the Office of Special Education. This included informing the council and public on various initiatives and projects around each priority area.

- Priority 1: Early Literacy
- Priority 2: Least Restrictive Environment
- Priority 3: Significant Disproportionality: Addressing Equity in Special Education

Presentation(s)

Program Spotlight Presentation – “Inclusive Outdoor Spaces” from the 4th Issue of the Special Education in Action; Presenter: Dr. Jessica Neu, BCBA-D, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Perth Amboy Public Schools

Resource Spotlight Presentation – “The NEW Office of Special Education Website” Presenter: Mrs. Alexandra Pensiero, Ed.S., Federal Reporting and Engagement Specialist, Office of Special Education

General Presentation – “Understanding the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report” Presenter: Dr. Damian Petino, PsyD, Assistant Director, Office of Special Education

Council Discussion –

Old Business

During October’s closed meeting orientation, with the Technical Assistance for NJ-SSEAC, there were five priorities proposed as a focus for the council during the 2022-2023 school year. During the old business, the 15 council members and eight resource members voted to determine two to three priorities. The vote was conducted, anonymously via Mentimeter. Members were asked to vote twice and indicate that they had voted in the chat to ensure quorum was met. The council collectively determined that they would identify three priority initiatives, instead of the originally determined two.

The results were as followed:

- Disproportionality – 8 votes
- Least Restrictive Environment – 9 votes
- Early Literacy – 8 votes

- Mental Health in Special Education – 12 votes
- Recruitment and Retention – 9 votes

New Business

The secretary of the council, Alexandra Pensiero, identified that council members would have the opportunity to voluntarily sign up for subcommittees related to the priorities established during the old business portion of today's meetings. The Microsoft Forms would be sent via email within a week following the meeting.

Announcements

Fred Buglione identified an opportunity through the [Inclusion Conference](#) that will be hosted by the NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education and co-sponsored by the NJDOE OSE and Montclair State University Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health.

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. However, he reported that comments, concerns and recommendations were to inform current and future work of the council.

A parent, identified as Ms. Mushana K Dunham Bey, indicated that she had emailed SPEDadvisorycouncil@doe.nj.gov. In the email, she identified several questions and concerns but verbalized during the live meeting that she would like to elaborate on her communication. The email was reviewed by the secretary and shared with the chairperson, Dr. Paul Barbato. The email identified the following concerns: "I have been speaking to this council and I have made complaints to NJ DOE. There is no SEPAG in East Orange NJ school District. How can this continue and I would like to know what information was submitted during my complaint process by the District? Enough is really enough. I have been in Due Process on going since 2019. No relief as yet to come to children. The way the District is crafty with everything from emails to paperwork is disturbing Due Process is almost impossible. Please advise why everytime I send an email to the Committee I've been forwarded to SPAN specifically Mrs. Esposito? I spent the whole Pandemic attending weekly and monthly Trainings with SPAN and am still facing challenges with working collaboratively with my District".

Dr. Luann Breese, identified as a former special education teacher in Elizabeth, emailed SPEDadvisorycouncil@doe.nj.gov, and further verbalized her correspondence during the public portion of the meeting. Dr. Breese reported that she "forced to resign due to illegal activity the district wanted me to participate in". Her emailed stated that "I refused and was blackballed as well as forced to resign as they made it extremely difficult everyday to continue doing my job legally. I have sent copies of my investigation about the illegalities in the district to commissioners and the Attorney General and nothing is ever done to these administrators who break the law everyday. They are allowed to violate the civil rights of special needs children everyday and have gotten away with it for years. I would like the opportunity to speak with someone at the state level about the injustices done to students, teachers and parents in the school district. I have detailed copies of what has transpired as well as information on many administrators, who are not qualified for the current positions they hold in the district."

Maria Lorenz, spoke publicly to the council. She identified that she was from Elizabeth Public School District. She reported her previous public comments related to an alleged racial incidence that occurred in her school district. She elaborated that these were. She communicated concerns around equity in support for districts versus individuals in due process and complaint procedures. She felt there was not resolution in the process. Additionally, she felt that districts should be required to hold SEPAG meetings.

- 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. She was also directed to email SPEDadvisorycouncil@doe.nj.gov with these concerns. *Note: Public comments received in writing were forwarded to the special education ombudsman email address within 24-48 hours of receipts.*

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

Adjournment

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 1:01 p.m.