

# **State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC)/Stakeholder Meeting**

**Hybrid Meeting Conducted In-Person at 200 Riverview Plaza, Trenton, NJ and**

**Utilizing the Microsoft Surface Hub via Microsoft Teams**

## **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Members (in attendance):** Dr. Paul Barbato, Elizabeth Alves, Dr. Dorothy McMullen, Jocelyn Gottlieb, Dr. Cynthia DeFina, Scott Longazel, Dr. Pamela Brillante, John Worthington, Dr. Harold Abraham, Gladasia Trotman, Amanda Villamar, Sonya Bertini, Dr. Peggy McDonald

**Members (not in attendance):** Jennifer Vecchiarelli

**Resource Representatives (in attendance):** Donna Holzschuh (JJC), Toni Scott (DOL)\*; Luiz Periera (OSSS), Carolyn Hayer (SPAN), Rakima Stokes-Little (DOC), Irene Lefebvre (NJSBA), Jessica Cubberley (CBVI)

**Resource Representatives (not in attendance):** Rachel LeddenAlbadine (DOH), Kelley Michalowski (DCF), Amy Gallagher (State McKinney-Vento)

**Guests from the NJ Department of Education (in attendance):** Kimberly A. Murray, Dr. Damian Petino, Dr. Chinwe Osondu, Alexandra Pensiero, JoAnn Johnson, Tracy Gillespie, Essence Maradiago, Barbara Haake, Adam Kendler, Sarah Schiffelbein, Steven Pasternak, Eileen Osieja, Christina Orozco, Joseph Dalia, Erice Reid, Iris DeVaughn, Sandra Gogerty, Jean Kelly, Teresa Quigley, Jennifer Nicosia, Jaime Jackett, Susan Naples

**Guests and Stakeholders from the Public (in attendance):** 973349XXXX\*\*, Kai Collins, Renay Zamloot, Keith Westpy, Katy McDermott, Luke Babits, Lauren Agoratus, Beth Cosentino, Olga G\*\*, Guest\*\*, Mushana K Dunham, Meghann Bierly, Dee\*\*, Amy Marini, Susan Coll-Guedes, Sandy G\*\*, Angela Colby-Visotsky, JSF\*\*, Jo A\*\*, 732972XXXX\*\*

\*Partial attendance is defined as less than 75% of the meeting, as reflected in that SSEAC ByLaws (Article VI(7)). Partial attendance does not count as being present.

\*\*The following members of the public were identified based on the name/number reflected upon accessing the meeting.

## **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Paul Barbato at 9:37 a.m.

## **Approvals – Minutes**

The November minutes were reviewed and approved.

## **Presentation(s)**

### *Office of Special Education Updates*

- Presenter: Kimberly A. Murray, Director of the Office of Special Education, updated SSEAC members on several items pertaining to the Office of Special Education.

### *Office of Special Education Presentation*

Updates: State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and High Leverage Practices

- Presenter: Dr. Chinwe Osondu, Assistant Director, Office of Special Education; Erice Reid, Inclusion and State Transformation Specialist, Office of Special Education

FY22 Least Restrictive Environment Indicators (5 and 6) and Introducing the Educational Environment Dashboard (Education in the LRE Priority Subcommittee)

- Presenters: Dr. Eileen Osieja, LRE Facilitator, Office of Special Education; Jennifer Nicosia, State Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator, Office of Special Education; and, Alexandra Pensiero, Federal Reporting and Engagement Specialist, Office of Special Education

### *Priority Subcommittee Requested Presentation*

Discipline or Intervention? A Rationale for Root Cause Driven Approaches to Student Behavior

- Presenter: Dr. Sharon Lohrmann, Director, NJ Positive Behavior Support in Schools (NJPBSIS)

## **Council Discussion –**

### **Old Business**

Council members were provided a link to the Dispute Resolution Findings.

Council members were informed of the request status and exploration process for annual reporting procedures.

### **New Business**

Council members were notified of the retirement of Eva Scott, Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI) from the Department of Human Services (DHS) who will be replaced by Jessical Cubberley-Frazette, Director of CBVI (DHS).

Council members were notified of the resignation of council member Diane Perez, a parent member. The Department will be announcing open application procedures in the coming months.

Council Ad Hoc reviewed the upcoming meeting reminders and proposed topics.

Jocelyn Gottlieb, assistant chairperson, reviewed the status and activities of the engagement committee, prioritizing parent and family voices.

Priority subcommittee leads gave their committee updates and reports.

Stakeholders, council members, and members of the public were invited to complete the NJ-SSEAC meeting evaluation form following the formal portion of the meeting.

### **Announcements**

Several council members announced training and resource opportunities during the public meeting. The engagement committee captured these announcements and sent them out in an email following the meeting with corresponding links.

### **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.*

Meghan Bierly made an in-person, public comment. She started her public comment by identifying her unique experiences as an advocate in the field. She acknowledged the wealth of information that was presented at the public meeting and queried how this information is being “funneled” to the field. She reported a need for the state, including local education agencies, to prioritize documentation, progress monitoring, and data quality. She ended the focus of her public comment on the challenges around dispute resolution. She indicated there was a lack of support for unserved and underrepresented populations. She reported on several financial barriers that limit access to due process procedures, including the example that families have to have “next to nothing” to receive free and reduced legal services. She feels that parents need more support and consideration to the length, time, and accessibility of child study team meetings should be reevaluated.

Mushana K Dunham commented on the presentations during the public meeting. She supported Ms. Bierly’s reported experiences with due process and highlighted the imbalance of power and resources that districts have during legal proceedings. Her identified goal was to find a resolution to her personal experiences in her district including having no director, lack of guidance at the local level for special education, and the lack of communication she receives with her child study team.

Renee from SPAN reported concerns regarding the use of restraints and how it is being written into Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). She expressed concerns that parents are signing IEPs without knowledge or understanding of how to contest them. She suggested that there is more consideration and oversight of the emergency procedures that are being used by districts.

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](mailto:SpEdAdvisoryCouncil@doe.nj.gov).

### **Adjournment**

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 1:07 p.m.