

STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL
National Conference Center at the Holiday Inn
399 Monmouth Street
East Windsor, NJ 08520

MINUTES

Thursday, December 20th, 2007

Members in attendance: Dr. Sharon Maricle, Dr. Howard Lerner, Philip Gartlan, William Sellar, Katherine Roberson, Carolyn Hayer, Kathleen Mullery, Debra Fernandez, Melinda Jennis, Angela Durso

Members not in attendance: Dr. Norma Blecker, Scott Elliott, Blanche Stetler

Resource Representatives in attendance: Donna Brown, Gordon Reibman, Elizabeth Collins

Resource Representatives not in attendance: Debbie Stewart

Guests and members of the public: Sol Heckelman, Martha Brecher, Peg Kinsell

I. ACCEPTANCE OF NOVEMBER MINUTES

The meeting was officially called to order at 9:45 a.m. by Chairperson Sharon Maricle. The November minutes were approved and seconded. **All in favor.**

II. PRESENTATION: School Funding Formula

On Wednesday, December 12, Governor Jon S. Corzine and Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy, announced a new school funding formula: A Formula for Success: *All Children, All Communities.*"

Ms. Barbara Gantwerk, Assistant Commissioner of Student Services, and Ms. Donna Arons, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, were invited to the SSEAC meeting to review the proposed funding formula. Ms. Arons provided background information regarding the development of the formula and then reviewed various components of the formula, including the hybrid census approach to special education funding and the extraordinary aid provision.

A question and answer and comment period followed the presentation. Members expressed concerns with regard to the time table for consideration and adoption of the formula, the census approach vs per pupil count, the implications for in-district versus separate public/private placements, and the differing costs associated with the varying needs of students with disabilities.

Handouts included the power point presentation - A Formula for Success: *All Children, All Communities.*" and an overview of additional school funding information.

III. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Local District Special Education Rate Profiles:

District profiles are now posted on the NJDOE website as of December 18, 2007. The profiles were embargoed for one week so that districts could ask for clarification regarding the data. Changes to the data were not permitted.

Relatively few inquiries were received by NJOSEP. The majority of the questions were about the calculations for graduation rates and drop-out rates. As a result of the districts' questions, data notes and explanations were added to the profile. Dr. Whole attributed the need for minimal clarification to the fact that the special education directors had been provided with a sample of the profile during her Director's Update Meetings in October and November with a full explanation of the federal reporting requirements.

As required, the USDOE, Office of Special Education Programs, was notified that the profiles were posted on the NJDOE website at: <http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/sppi/>.

Survey for Parents of Students with Disabilities

Dr. Wohle informed the SSEAC that the parent surveys had been distributed for the first cohort of districts on 12/17/07. The survey is being conducted as part of a federal requirement for New Jersey's State Performance Plan for Special Education (SPP), Indicator #8; Parental Involvement. Each year for the next five years, the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs will mail a survey in English and Spanish to parents of students with disabilities in a randomly selected sample of districts in the state. At the end of five years, all parents of students with disabilities in every district in New Jersey will have an opportunity to respond to the survey.

Handouts included a list of the school district names (year 1) and samples of actual surveys mailed to parents.

APR submission – February 1st Deadline

The State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report will be the focus of an all day meeting at LRC Central on January 11, 2008. Dr. Whole will discuss progress on targets with the special education stakeholder group, including the SSEAC membership

IV. COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council members expressed concern over the short time period given for review of the school funding formula and discussed the possibility of an official response from the SSEAC.

Dr. Maricle asked members to forward to the secretary, their suggestions for the position of "student member" on the council. She also proposed a new parent involvement subcommittee. A sheet was circulated for those who might be interested.

V. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Pat Kinsell from the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) addressed the council with her concerns about the funding formula. SPAN, one of nine statewide not-for-profit organizations, is part of *The Coalition for Special Education Funding Reform*. She urged council to ask more questions and to respond as a Council to this Formula being put forth so quickly.

Handout from *The Coalition for Special Education Funding Reform* with the Coalition recommendations for Special Education Funding - September 2007.

Sol Heckelman commented on the Parent Survey, suggesting that in the future we remain open to using other languages beside Spanish. He expressed concern with the manner in which some of the survey statements were worded.

Martha Brecher commented that today's presentation on the funding formula was both interesting and worrisome. She was concerned about how the formula would be implemented.

VI. LUNCH

VII. CONT. COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Caroline Hayer reiterated concern about the time table for approval of the formula that had been discussed in the earlier part of the meeting. In further discussions, other SSEAC members agreed that such a limited time to review this important piece of legislation was not in the best interest of the state. A **motion** was made and **seconded** that Dr. Sharon Maricle would draft a letter to Commissioner Davy expressing concerns about the quickness to adopt the funding formula.

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Transition Subcommittee

After dissemination of "transition" excerpts from New Jersey Special Ed Code, the committee focused on possible ways to link social skills teaching to successful transition outcomes. Kathy Roberson will talk with Dan Baker about Transition Coordinator roles and responsibilities. The committee will continue to look at this issue again next month.

Inclusion Subcommittee

Discussions focused on the perceived discrepancies in various regulations, between local school districts, county/regional commissions, and private schools and how these differences make it harder for local school districts to place students in an inclusive setting. Some of the areas of discrepancies are: 1) facilities planning, and approval of new/expanded facilities 2) requirements for obtaining funds for the construction of new facilities – what actions are allowed by the organization to lobby or encourage the voting body to approve funding 3) who is legally responsible for the repayment of the construction bonds. The committee would like to receive more information/presentation to help them make an informed recommendation to the Commissioner.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:45 p.m. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled on Jan. 17th, 2008 at the Holiday Inn in East Windsor.