

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

**MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 15, 2007**

**Members in attendance:**, Dr. Sharon Maricle, Carolyn Hayer, Philip Gartlan, Kathleen Mullery, William Sellar, Dr. Howard Lerner, Blanche Stetler, Katherine Roberson, Angela Durso

**Members not in attendance:** Scott Elliott, Melinda Jennis, Dr. Norma Blecker, Debra Fernandez

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

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:** Debbie Stewart

**Guests and members of the public:** Stephanie Kramer, Stephanie Glaser, Sol Heckelman, Lauren Agoratus, Peg Kinsell

**I. ACCEPTANCE OF DECEMBER MINUTES**

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

**II. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE**

**DOE Reorganization:** Barbara Gantwerk, former Director of the Office of Special Education, was officially appointed to the position of Assistant Commissioner of the Division of Student Services.

**SPP/APR:** The State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Review have been submitted to the federal Office of Special Education Programs. The documents will undergo review and USOSEP will determine whether the state meets requirements, needs assistance, or needs intervention. Dr. Wohle will keep the Council updated on the review process. Additionally, she shared with Council the verification visit letter that has already been received from the federal monitors.

**Self-Assessment:** DOE staff met with districts that will be doing the self-assessment this year. The self-assessment document has been aligned to the State Performance Plan and its indicators. Districts were targeted for self-assessment based on high rates of placement in separate special education public and/or private special education settings and disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. As a first step in the self-assessment, districts are in the process of verifying their placement and eligibility data. In response to a Council question, Dr. Wohle said that parents should be involved in the process. The DOE strongly suggests that a member of the parent advisory group be on the district's steering committee.

**Parent Advisory Groups:** Parent members of the Council believe that there has been some misunderstanding of the requirement for a special education parent advisory group in each district. In some districts, the group has been organized as a forum for "advising" parents, not seeking their input. Dr. Wohle agreed that some questions have arisen regarding the implementation of this requirement. She indicated that the code will likely be reopened to address a number of points that need further clarification or amending.

**Governor's Initiative on Autism:** The review of proposals for the Autism Grant has been completed and recipients announced. Fifty-five (55) awards were made. These proposals will now go through pre-award revisions.

**The Governor's Initiative: Enhancing and Expanding In-district Program Options for Students with Disabilities:** The Department is now accepting proposals for a grant focused on expanding or enhancing in-district programs for students with disabilities. \$9 million dollars (\$4.5 million in state funding and \$4.5 million

in federal IDEA funds) has been dedicated to offer a 25-month grant program to: (a) organize and implement enhanced and/or expanded in-district public school program options that afford opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in academic, non-academic, and extra-curricular programs with nondisabled peers and (b) encourage, where possible, cross-district planning in order to have an effective and efficient multi-district approach to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. This 25-month grant program will begin June 1, 2007 and end June 30, 2009. Applications are due in by March 15<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Wohle will meet with the reader panels later this month to begin the evaluation process.

**III. PRESENTATION:** Revised New Jersey Special Education Code: Discipline Requirements  
Melanie O’Dea and Steve Coplin, Office of Special Education Programs

Ms. O’Dea and Mr. Coplin reviewed with Council the changes to NJAC regarding discipline that have come about as a result of IDEA 2004. The presentation focused particularly on the discipline requirements related to short and long-term suspensions of students with disabilities.

Council members expressed concern regarding the number of students who are sent out of district as a result of discipline infractions. In many districts, no alternative settings are readily available. As a result, many students with disabilities receive services through (sometimes extended) periods of home instruction. Mr. Coplin responded that identified districts will receive technical assistance that will help them develop more proactive intervention strategies (rather than punitive ones) to reduce the number of multiple and long-term suspensions.

**IV. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Sol Heckelman encouraged the Council and Department to continue calling for and assisting districts in implementing more positive behavioral strategies and supports. Peg Kinsell expressed concern about the revised discipline requirements, in particular the district’s ability to determine what constitutes a “pattern” of behavior in the case of multiple suspensions. Even infractions that don’t appear to be substantially similar may arise from the same underlying causes. Mr. Coplin agreed that school personnel should look at the underlying causes and added that parents can challenge their decision through discussion, mediation, or due process.

**V. LUNCH**

Standing committees met during lunch.

**VI. COMMITTEE MEETINGS/COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

**Transition:** The committee would like to further disseminate their recommendations from last year, perhaps through the CIL newsletter. The committee would like to see parents play a more proactive role in improving special education within districts through the parent advisory group. They will consider possible code clarifications or changes to facilitate this.

**Inclusion:** The committee would like to get feedback from districts who received capacity building grants and/or who attended the Inclusion Institutes to see if and how their efforts have been sustained.

Dr. Maricle discussed with Council members how they might find more time for their committee work. The presentations to Council seem to take up much of the morning and yet are a useful source of information to the Council. Members suggested that certain meetings be designated as working sessions. It was also suggested the Council explore the possibility of a mailbox or chat area so that they can exchange ideas via e-mail. Dr. Maricle asked members to commit to a 2:00 meeting so that committee work can be conducted in the afternoon.

Council would like to follow up and follow through on some of the recommendations they made last year. Dr. Maricle suggested contacting John Worthington and other SSEACs to find out what the Council can do to encourage action on their recommendations.

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 p.m. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for April 19, 2007 at the Holiday Inn in East Windsor.