

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

MINUTES

Thursday, April 19, 2007

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

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

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

Resource Representatives not in attendance:

Guests and members of the public: Sol Heckelman, Lauren Agoratus

I. ACCEPTANCE OF MARCH MINUTES

The meeting was officially called to order at 9:50 a.m. by Chairperson Dr. Sharon Maricle. The March minutes were approved. **All in favor.**

Dr. Maricle congratulated Dr. Roberta Wohle on her official appointment as Director of the Office of Special Education programs.

II. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

SPP/APR: The federal Office of Special Education Programs has reviewed New Jersey's State Performance Plan and has requested additional information regarding Indicator 8-Parent Involvement. The Department must determine a target number for the percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement. This information was not provided initially since the Department was still in the process of approving and purchasing a survey instrument. Dr. Wohle asked the Council for its input on target setting. Council members suggested setting the target based on the results of a previous parent survey that the Department conducted.

Dr. Wohle will participate in a conference call this week to discuss issues concerning disproportionality. The conference call is intended to clarify and distinguish the requirements for the following:

- districts identified as having **significant disproportionality** in the number of minority students receiving special education services that must use 15% of their Part B Funds to develop early intervening services; and
- districts identified for Indicators 9 and 10 in the State Performance Plan that have disproportionate representation requiring a review of policies, procedures and practices, but not the 15% allocation for early intervening services.

These requirements may actually result in the identification of at least two different target groups.

Based on USOSEP's guidance, Dr. Wohle indicated that the NJOSEP may modify its procedures to identify: (1) districts with significant disproportionality, (2) districts with disproportionate representation, (3) districts where disproportionality is an area of concern and (4) districts where the December 1 data does not indicate a problem.

Parent Advisory Groups: Dr. Wohle attended a workshop session regarding Parent Advisory Committees at the recent NJSPAN conference. Both districts and parents believe that further clarification is needed about the formation and function of the committee. This may require adding to or revising the existing regulations. SPAN is looking at what other states are doing in this area. Dr. Wohle suggested that the Council meet or exchange ideas over the summer (July) in order to offer the Department feedback on what changes could be made.

Unfunded Mandates: Four Special Services School Districts and the Shamong Board of Education have filed a challenge regarding the change in the elementary class age span requirements from 4 to 3 year based on the belief it is an unfunded mandate. Dr. Wohle will keep the Council posted on the progress of the challenge.

APA/Statewide Assessments: Dr. Wohle and other NJDOE staff met with representatives from NJEA who voiced the following concerns about the APA: (1) it takes too much time to develop the portfolios, (2) districts need to spend money for substitutes to provide preparation time for the teachers, and (3) instructional programs are being changed to create artificial connections to grade level standards. Dr. Wohle said there is still misunderstanding regarding the requirement that instructional activities be related to grade level standards. Based on the outcome of the federal peer review of the APA and feedback from the field, the Department will have to determine if changes need to be made to the APA and, if so, the type and extent of the changes.

Dr. Wohle also commented on the testimony of Rebecca Cort, Deputy Commissioner of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities in New York State, to Congress regarding the reauthorization of NCLB and the 2% flexibility for the assessment of students with disabilities. Dr. Cort's testimony included the recommendation that states be permitted to develop modified standards and modified assessments that will be measuring standards that are substantively different from the general education standards. Dr. Wohle will share a copy of Dr. Cort's testimony at the next Council meeting.

III. PRESENTATION: Community-Based Instruction, Dan Baker, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities

Dr. Baker spoke to the Council about the importance of community-based instruction (CBI) for students with disabilities. The Boggs Center and the Department are currently partnering to provide information and professional development on CBI to school districts to encourage its integration into programs of instruction. Several introductory sessions have been held as well as specific sessions regarding administrative support, job development, and practices for students with severe disabilities. Dr. Baker stressed that CBI is not field trips, but rather sustained instructional activities in natural community environments that facilitate job and social skill development and generalization. It should incorporate the CCCS, not be seen as an alternative program of instruction. Implementing a program involves finding employers in the community who will participate. The Structured Learning Experience Coordinator in the district can be helpful in this capacity. Districts must also consider issues of transportation, funding and liability.

PRESENTATION: National Disability Mentoring Day, Kelly Jiras, Allies, Inc.

Kelly Jiras of Allies Incorporated gave a brief presentation on National Disability Mentoring Day. For one day, students with disabilities are matched to participating job sites to offer them job shadowing and/or career exploration experiences. The event will take place this year on October 17th. Ms. Jiras encouraged Council members to spread the word to both students and employers who may be interested in participating.

IV. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Lauren Agoratus informed the Council about the "Choices" summer program being run by Cerebral Palsy of New Jersey. The program will provide summer transition activities for students with disabilities age 14-21. There is also a summer camp program for younger students. Ms. Agoratus suggested that the program might be considered by districts in conjunction with or in lieu of Extended School Year programs.

V. LUNCH

Standing committees met during lunch.

VI. COMMITTEE MEETINGS/COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Transition: The Transition Committee would like to include information about their discussions and recommendations in the CIL statewide newsletter. They will contact the Department for guidance. They would also like to see the Council do more to educate the public about the Council and its activities. They asked Sharon to explore the possibility of a SSEAC e-mail address and reprinting the SSEAC brochure for distribution. They will continue to collect information on best practices regarding the teaching of “soft skills” and to explore ways to connect these skills to existing DOE initiatives.

Inclusion: The Inclusion Committee would like to obtain information (1) from districts who were originally awarded inclusion grants to find out what these districts have done/are doing to sustain inclusive practices and (2) from educators, parents, and DOE representatives regarding schools that are successfully including students. The Committee will explore the possibility of providing financial incentives to such districts. The Committee will also explore ways to disseminate information on best practices, DOE initiatives, and inclusion resources to teachers throughout the state. Suggestions included a newsletter or other written/electronic publication. A list of resources will be obtained from the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education.

Council discussed possible speakers/discussion topics for next year. They are interested in hearing about the results of the Transition Outcomes survey that will be conducted by the Department for the first time this year. They are also interested in a historical review of the inclusion initiatives and grants that been implemented by the Department.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55 p.m. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for May 17, 2007 at the Holiday Inn in East Windsor.