

# STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Holiday Inn and National Conference Center  
East Windsor, New Jersey

## Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 16, 2017

**Members in attendance:** Myriam Alizo, Susan Colacello, Barbara Gantwerk, Beth Kelley, Deborah Lynam, Melanie McGackin, Magaly Milton, Leslie Rubinstein, Amy Smith, Fred Tchang, Dorothy Van Horn

**Members not in attendance:** Paul Barbato, Mary Ann Comparetto, Chris Shamburg

**Resource Representatives in attendance:** Donna Holzschuh, Eva Scott, Cheri Thompson

**Resource Representatives not in attendance:** Dawn Mergen, Kelley Michalowski

**Guests and members of the public:** Lauren Agoratus, Tracey Brown, Kelly Emanuel, Sol Heckelman, Barbara Haake, Cynthia Hoenes-Saindon, Lauren Krempecki, Jeanne Lopez, Lori Marabella, Anfal Muhammed-Jenkins, Isabella Sutton

### I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by chair Dorothy Van Horn at 9:39 a.m.

### II. ACCEPTANCE OF FEBRUARY MINUTES

The February minutes were reviewed. After being properly moved and seconded, they were approved unanimously.

### III. DIRECTORS UPDATE

John Worthington asked the Council for approval to have the May 18, 2017 SSEAC meeting changed to a Special Education Stakeholder meeting. Council members and the other stakeholders will be asked to set the new risk ratio formula for Disproportionality as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

John Worthington shared with the Council that the Office of Special Education will conduct a Dispute Resolution Summit on April 25, 2017.

John Worthington announced that a candidate for the Ombudsman position has been selected and that he is hoping for hiring approval and a start date sometime in the Fall/Winter.

John Worthington updated the Council on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Settlement trainings. He also shared that April 3<sup>rd</sup> is the submission date for the SSIP.

John Worthington announced that Sue Martz, Chief Learning Supports and Specialized Services Officer/Assistant Commissioner will be retiring on April 20, 2017.

John Worthington provided information to the Council on PARCC testing. Statewide testing in New Jersey begins again during the week of March 27-31.

John Worthington informed the Council that New Jersey's Application Under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 for Federal Fiscal Year 2017 is posted under the Highlights section on the Office's website. Public comment can be accepted until April 7, 2017. The link is here: <http://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/>

John Worthington updated the Council on the changes in ESSA regarding teacher certification, explaining the ramifications for teachers with the certification of Teacher of the Handicapped (TOH) and Teacher of Students with Disabilities (TOSD). Council Q&A followed.

#### **IV. PRESENTATION**

Cynthia Hoenes-Saindon and Barbara Haake of the Office of Special Education Policies and Procedures presented to the Council on "*The Facilitated IEP*". 2016-2017 is a pilot year with four districts taking part; Elizabeth, West Windsor-Plainsboro, Hamilton (Mercer County) and Cherry Hill. Five paid facilitators were selected, trained and will be available to all districts statewide beginning July 1, 2017. Request forms will be available to parents and districts on the Offices of Special Education website just prior to July 1<sup>st</sup>. The service will be free to districts; up to a maximum of forty, first come first served, IEP meetings statewide. The program is voluntary, with the only requirement being that the meeting be scheduled for a three-hour time frame. The project is intended to lessen the need for mediation or due process.

#### **V. COUNCIL DISCUSSION/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Dorothy Van Horn reported to the Council that the letter regarding New Jersey's diploma for high school graduation had been forwarded to the Commissioner of Education. She also shared the letter of denial of waiver that she received from the United States Department of Education regarding New Jersey's September 22, 2011 request for a waiver of the requirement to maintain State financial support for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). John Worthington provided an overview to the Council and stated that an appeal would be filed.

Susan Colacello shared with the Council her current challenges regarding the planning process for her son's transition out of high school; including the lack of structured learning experiences and district funding for transportation and transition coordinator positions.

Leslie Rubinstein informed the Council of a conference that the Learning Disabilities Association of New Jersey will be conducting. The *Life After High School & Post-Secondary Resource Expo* will be on Saturday, May 13, 2017 in Princeton, New Jersey.

Beth Kelley offered that services are provided by each County Office of Education and by Special Services School Districts (SSSDs). There is a County Supervisor of Child Study (CSCS) for all 21 counties in New Jersey.

Melanie McGacken related that some districts are trying to move complaints straight to due process in order to frighten parents with attorney fees.

## **VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Lauren Agoratus offered that there are several agencies that provide Transition services, including The Centers for Independent Living <http://www.njsilc.org/> and the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVRS).  
[http://careerconnections.nj.gov/careerconnections/plan/foryou/disable/vocational\\_rehabilitation\\_services.shtml](http://careerconnections.nj.gov/careerconnections/plan/foryou/disable/vocational_rehabilitation_services.shtml)

Jeanne Lopez would like to see safeguards in place with regard to attorney's fees for parents with limited funds when going up against districts with less limited funds.

Sol Heckelman appreciated the presentation on the Facilitated IEP and found it to be straight forward and clear. He also offered that his association, The New Jersey Association of School Psychologists is offering a program related to New Jersey's Tiered System of Supports (NJTSS) on March 29, 2017.

Kelly Emanuel expressed that she feels that districts do use leverage against parents. She inquired as to whether or not there are unscheduled compliance monitoring visits to schools.

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

The public portion of the meeting was adjourned at 11:32 a.m.

The next meeting of the SSEAC is scheduled for Thursday, April 20, 2017 at the Holiday Inn and National Conference Center in East Windsor, New Jersey