

State Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, October 21, 2025

Location: Victory Building, Suite 445, Conference Room

Council Members Present:

Candie Corona
Sydney Dennis
Dr. Ruth Eyres
DJ Graham
Dewey Graves
Shelby Knight
Dr. Suzanne Kucharczyk
Leo Mabry
Lacey Monroe
Kimberly Morrison
Darlene Owens
Michael Stewart for Tracy Dowell
Eric Treat
Jolie Whitley
Cindy Willis

Special Education Staff Present:

Dr. Jeff Adams
Becky Bell
Bonnie Boaz
Dr. Laura Goadrich
Yvonne Greene
Josh Hart
Becky McIver
Melissa McLendon
Sarah Simpson
Michelle Waldo

Guests:

Angalec Hogan (DCFS)
Vicki King (DESE)

Meeting Proceedings

Call to Order:

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m., led by Ms. Jolie Whitley, Chairperson. Ms. Whitley welcomed all Advisory Council members and Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education (DESE-OSE) staff.

Advisory Council Annual Report:

Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Education for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, presented key highlights from the 2024-2025 Arkansas State Advisory Council for Special Education Annual Report and reviewed the focus areas for 2025-2026. Dr. Adams shared the following focus areas for the 2025-2026 year:

- Meaningful Access and Participation for Students
- School Age and Early Childhood Outcomes – Part C to Part B Transition
- Graduation Expectations
- Dyslexia Updates
- Family Engagement
- Review and Revision of Special Education Rules and Regulations to allow greater flexibility within a student-focused learning system
- Universal Design for Learning
- SSIP SiMR (State-identified Measurable Result) refinement of the SSIP Evaluation System
- State Personnel Development Grant - Priorities from OSEP for next grant period
- Utilizing Special Education Funding to Support Meaningful Access and Participation
- Education Support and Related Services Specialists
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports for Behavior and Mental Health
- Course Codes for the Meaningful Access and Participation Timeline

- 3rd Grade Promotion/Individualized Reading Plans/Math Intervention Plans/Instructional Coherence

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

A motion to approve the minutes from the July 22, 2025, meeting made by Mr. DJ Graham and seconded by Mr. Dewey Graves. The council approved the minutes.

Dyslexia Updates:

Ms. Vicki King, Dyslexia Specialist, for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Learning Services, presented to the group regarding Dyslexia Updates. Revisions to the Arkansas Dyslexia law require universal dyslexia screening for all K–3 students, to identify reading difficulties early and possibly reduce later special education referrals. The biggest change is the introduction of the K-3 ATLAS Screener, which replaces multiple existing screeners and adds language comprehension components. In future years, screening data will be available to schools within 48 hours, allowing quicker intervention. For K–2 students who flag on the screener, teachers will use a Level 1 informal screener based on classroom data, while grades 3–12 will use a Level 2 formal screener if deficits in fluency or spelling are found. Individual Reading Plans (IRPs) are required for both groups. To support implementation, each educational cooperative now has a dedicated dyslexia specialist focused solely on assisting districts. Vicki also discussed the 3rd Grade Promotion requirement under LEARNS, which takes effect with this year’s third-grade students.

State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) Updates:

Becky McIver, State Systemic Improvement Plan Coordinator, for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, presented an overview of the newly awarded 2025–2030 SPDG, a five-year, \$5.8 million grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The grant focuses on building leadership capacity, strengthening educator practice, and fostering collaboration with families to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The grant aligns with Arkansas State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and supports the Meaningful Access and Participation (MAP) Project.

SPP/APR Initial Reflection:

Dr. Laura Goadrich, Director of IDEA Data & Research, reviewed the initial reflections on the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) for FFY 2024 or SY 2024-25 for all but indicators 1, 2, and 4 which are SY 2023-24, focusing on key compliance and results indicators.

For the reporting year, several targets were met, indicating areas of success. The **School Age Environment (Indicator 5)** targets were met across all sub-indicators (5a, 5b, 5c), demonstrating high rates of students (5-21) served inside the regular classroom, and these targets are now being adjusted upward. Additionally, the **Graduation (Indicator 1)** target of 88.00% was exceeded with a rate of 89.57%. The **Dropout (Indicator 2)** target was also met, showing a significant single-year reduction to 6.80%. Finally, compliance targets were met for **Resolution Sessions (Indicator 15)** with a 66% resolution rate for due process requests, and for **Mediation (Indicator 16)** with a 100% success rate for non-due process mediation.

However, some indicator areas did not meet targets. Those areas included **Preschool Environment (Indicator 6)**, sub-indicators 6a and 6b (students served most or some of the time in their Early Childhood program). Notably, the target for 6b has not been met since 2019-20 and will be reset. Furthermore, targets for all six sub-indicators under **Early Childhood Outcomes**

(Indicator 7)—for Positive Social-Emotional, Acquisition & Use of Knowledge, and Appropriate Behaviors—demonstrating improvement or age expectations by exit were not met.

Nominations for Parents, People with Disabilities and Advocates:

Dr. Ruth Eyres gave a nomination for person with a disability; Ms. Jolie Whitley gave a nomination for a public charter school member and Mr. Dewey Graves gave a nomination for an advocate. Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Programs for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education (DESE-OSE), reminded the council that nominations are forwarded to the Secretary of Education for final approval.

New Student Member(s):

Dr. Jeff Adams shared nominees for post-secondary and secondary student members. Two nominees were recommended by the Advisory Council to submit for approval to Secretary of Education for Council membership.

Section Highlights:

Section Highlights were presented and are available on the Special Education website.

Future Meeting Topics:

- Invite new President of AR CEC to share their role and vision for 2026

Mr. Eric Treat made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Darlene Owens seconded the motion.

Next Steps and Final Remarks:

The next Council meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at 1:56 p.m.