

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

Date: Tuesday, April 21, 2026

Location: Victory Building, Suite 445, Conference Room

Council Members Present:

Andrew Aston
Denyiah Bridges
Dr. Dawn Childress
Susan Cottle
Sydney Dennis
Dr. Ruth Eyres
DJ Graham via Zoom
Dewey Graves via Zoom
Rolanda Haynes
Tim Johnston
Dr. Suzanne Kucharczyk
Leo Mabry
Lacey Monroe
Kimberly Morrison
Michael Stewart
David Terrell
Rebecca Walker via Zoom
Jolie Whitley
Cindy Willis

DESE/Special Education Staff Present:

Dr. Jeff Adams
Becky Bell
Dana Bennett (MITS)
Bonnie Boaz
Dr. Laura Goadrich
Yvonne Greene
Josh Hart via Zoom
Becky McIver
Melissa McLendon
Rick Porter
Rhonda Saunders
Michelle Waldo

Meeting Proceedings

Call to Order:

The meeting began at 10:00 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. All council members introduced themselves and spoke about the stakeholders they represent.

Overview of Roberts Rules:

Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Programs for DESE-OSE, gave a brief overview of Roberts Rules of Order to all Council members.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

A motion to approve the minutes from the January 20, 2026, meeting was made by Ms. Lacey Monroe and seconded by Ms. Cindy Willis. The Council approved the minutes.

Introduction of New Advisory Council Members:

Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Programs for DESE-OSE, introduced newly appointed, for the first time ever student and post-secondary members:

- Ms. Denyiah Bridges
- Mr. Andrew Aston

Introduction of New ADE-OSE Staff Members:

Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Programs for DESE-OSE, introduced newly appointed staff member:

- Ms. Jessica Green, Compliance Specialist for Dispute Resolution

Arkansas' Part B Interactive Spreadsheet FFY26:

Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Programs for the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education (DESE-OSE), provided an overview of Arkansas' Part B Interactive Spreadsheet for FFY26. The annual application pertains to the money the state received from the federal government for the education of students with disabilities. The proposed budget was discussed, and Council Members provided input. The following considerations were suggested by the Council:

- Small districts with declining enrollment. As Meaningful Access Participation (MAP) Academy rolls out next year, consider a cadre or group where small school districts can collaborate and creatively brainstorm to meet expectations of ACT 565 and MAPs.
- 1003 funds for schools that need targeted assistance for Special Education – updating LEAs with any changes to that system.
- Professional development (PD) for building and district administration about the impact and importance of SPED.

Annual Performance Review (APR)

Dr. Laura Goadrich, Director of IDEA Data and Research, provided an overview of the February 2026 SPP/APR reporting cycle, covering both Cycle 7 and off-cycle data. To support the council's review, each member was provided with IDC 2020-2025 SPP/APR Indicator cards and indicator banner pens, serving as a quick-reference guide for the indicators.

Ms. Yvonne Green, Coordinator of Monitoring, presented on Indicators 4a and 4b (Suspension and Expulsion). She transitioned from abstract percentages to specific district counts to provide a clearer picture of the state's longitudinal impact. Mrs. Green also addressed Indicators 9 and 10 (Disproportionality), explaining the state's methodology for identifying districts and the subsequent file reviews used to ensure student eligibility and appropriate identification practices. Furthermore, she clarified that the department promotes "Integrated Monitoring," a strategy focused on identifying the "root cause" of data trends rather than merely verifying compliance.

Ms. Melissa McLendon, Coordinator of Part B Early Childhood, led the discussion on Indicator 12, detailing its five measurements and the logistical impacts of late referrals. During this segment, a council member raised concerns regarding behavior support for three-year-olds, specifically asking about the prevalence of Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) in preschool settings. Mrs. McLendon noted that while FBAs are utilized, the primary focus for this age group remains on developmental support and environmental adjustments.

Ms. Becky Bell, Coordinator of Assessment and Curriculum, provided a comprehensive review of all four sections of Indicator 3 (Assessment). She emphasized that Arkansas is prioritizing "High-Leverage Practices" to improve student proficiency and participation. This prompted a discussion regarding the 1% cap on alternate assessments; council members noted that smaller districts with specialized "cluster" programs often naturally exceed this threshold. This feedback led to a productive dialogue regarding the state's 1% waiver submission process.

Ms. Bonnie Boaz, Transition Coordinator, presented on Indicator 14, noting improved outcomes across all three post-secondary categories. The council discussed the persistent challenge of locating students one year after graduation to complete surveys. Mrs. Boaz highlighted various transition resources and regional events designed to engage students in post-secondary planning well before they graduate.

The session concluded with a brief preview of the indicators slated for the October meeting. The OSE Council was commended for their high level of engagement; their feedback and reflections will be formally integrated into the SPP/APR stakeholder feedback for FFY 2025.

Section Highlights:

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

Future Meeting Topics:

- Film Camp Presentation by Ms. Denyiah Bridges

Ms. Lacey Moore made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Dr. Suzanne Kucharczyk seconded the motion.

Next Steps and Final Remarks:

The next Council meeting is scheduled for 10:00 a.m. on July 21, 2026, at The Hilton Garden Inn Little Rock Downtown. The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m.