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

Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026
Location: Victory Building, Suite 445, Conference Room

Council Members Present:
Candie Corona via Zoom
Sydney Dennis
Dr. Ruth Eyres
DJ Graham
Tim Johnston
Shelby Knight
Dr. Suzanne Kucharczyk
Leo Mabry
Lacey Monroe
Kimberly Morrison
Michael Stewart for Tracy Dowell
David Terrell for Sara Squires
Rebecca Walker
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
Danita Pitts
Rick Porter
Rhonda Saunders
Sarah Simpson
Michelle Waldo

Guests:
Dr. Rachel Siever (EARS)

Meeting Proceedings

Call to Order:
The meeting began at 9:02 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.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:
A motion to approve the minutes from the October 21, 2025, meeting was made by Mr. Michael Stewart and seconded by Mr. DJ Graham. The Council approved the minutes.

Introduction of New ADE-OSE Staff Members:
Dr. Jeff Adams, Director of Special Programs for DESE-OSE, introduced newly appointed staff members:

- Ms. Brandey Burnett, Program Advisor for CAYSI
- Ms. Ashley Irvin, Program Advisor for Monitoring

McKinney-Vento Act/Education for Homeless
Mr. David Terrell, Education Professional I, for DESE, Federal Programs, gave an overview of McKinney-Vento/Homeless Education.
Homeless Education is a requirement for all public LEAs that receive Title I funds. A portion of our state districts are McKinney-Vento grantees, or recipients of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's competitive grant. ADE's homeless education program offers

technical assistance to local districts through various communications and trainings who, in turn, collaborate with community partners to provide wraparound services for their homeless children and youth. Title I set-asides and McKinney-Vento funds are supplemental to each district. For students served on IEPs, SPED-identified students, there are possibilities for future conversations and cross-collaborations of funding opportunities. For Fiscal Year 2027, homeless education and IDEA programs will likely work more closely to improve educational stability for Arkansan youth.

Arkansas IDEA Celebrates 50 Years!

Ms. Sarah Simpson, Education Professional I, for DESE-OSE shared a historical perspective on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). First enacted in 1975 as Public Law 94-142, the Act transformed education by guaranteeing students with disabilities the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Prior to the law, millions of children were excluded from public schools. They were often institutionalized, and families had little voice in educational decisions. Over time, IDEA expanded eligibility, emphasized inclusion in general education, and strengthened accountability. IDEA now serves over 8 million students nationwide and reflects a lasting national commitment to meaningful access for all students. Happy 50th birthday to IDEA!

ADAPT Accessibility Data

Dr. Laura Goadrich, Director of IDEA Data & Research, for DESE-OSE, shared that the Arkansas Department of Education's Office of Special Education has successfully pioneered the implementation of the Accessible Data Analysis and Publishing Tool (ADAPT), becoming the first state in the nation to adopt this "born accessible" platform developed by the Rhonda Weiss Center. Designed to make IDEA Section 616 and 618 data more transparent and user-friendly, ADAPT ensures high accessibility standards, including WCAG 2.2 compliance and screen reader compatibility. All 618 IDEA data files have been uploaded to the Arkansas implementation at https://ose-adapt-viewer.ade.arkansas.gov/ and https://ose-adapt-admin.ade.arkansas.gov/, transitioning from static national datasets to an interactive environment that allows stakeholders to better visualize and use special education data. The advisory board enjoyed reviewing the implementation and found the site accessible. There was a request to add a glossary of terminology to each generated report and this request was sent to the Weiss Center. Arkansas completed its implementation in fall 2025 and is assisting other states as they pursue 618 data accessibility.

The EARS Program: Supporting Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Dr. Rachel Sievers, Audiologist/EARS Program Manager for Arkansas Children's Hospital shared about the Educational Audiology/Speech Pathology Resources for Schools (EARS), a statewide outreach initiative supported through partnerships with Arkansas Children's, a grant from the Arkansas Department of Education, and contracts with school districts and early childhood centers. The program provides comprehensive on-site audiology and speech-language pathology services, including hearing screenings, diagnostic support, participation in IEP and 504 planning, classroom acoustics evaluation, assistive technology support, and specialized assessments for students who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH), along with mentorship for school-based speech-language pathologists. Emphasis was placed on the significant listening challenges D/HH students face in typical classroom environments and the legal obligation of

schools under IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA to ensure equal access. The presentation highlighted the importance of accommodations, specialized instruction, and assistive technologies, such as FM/DM systems, soundfield amplification, and Bluetooth tools, in improving access to instruction. Overall, the EARS Program equips educators with critical resources, training, and technology to support the academic and social success of D/HH students, and several success stories were shared to illustrate its impact.

Film Camp Premier
Ms. Bonnie Boaz, Arkansas State Transition Coordinator for Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, provided updates on this year's Film Camp and College Bound Arkansas. Arkansas Transition Services, in collaboration with Career and Technical Education and University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical College, hosted a weeklong short film camp for 50 high school students with disabilities. Joey Travolta and his crew from Inclusion Films guided three teams of students in creating short films and public service announcements. Through the camp, students practiced a variety of employment skills and discovered strengths they hadn't realized they had. By the end of the week, they had not only produced short films, but also formed lasting memories and friendships.

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

Future Meeting Topics:
- CIRCLES Presentation

Ms. Cindy Willis made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Tim Johnston seconded the motion.

Next Steps and Final Remarks:
The next Council meeting is scheduled for April 21, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at 2:39 p.m.