

Minutes

State Advisory Council for the Education of Children with Disabilities

The Arkansas Advisory Council for the Education of Individuals with Disabilities met in the Conference Room at the Victory Building, Suite 445, on Thursday, April 21, 2016.

Council Members Present:

Bobby Acklin
Cindy Ball
Maryanne Caldwell
Dana Davis
Courtney Eubanks
Kathleen Atkins
Leslie Faulkner
Shelby Knight
Candia Nicholas
Sherry Rogers
Marylene Tate
Eric Treat
Barry Vuletich

Special Education Staff Present:

Linda Barnes
Bonnie Boaz
Becky Cezar
Jody Fields
Jennifer Gonzales
Lisa Haley
Veronica Milton
Courtney Salas-Ford
Rhonda Saunders
Robin Stripling

The meeting began at 9:20 a.m. with Courtney Eubanks, Co-Chairperson, calling the Council meeting to order and welcoming the Advisory Council members and Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE-SEU) staff. Ms. Becky Cezar, Administrator for Monitoring and Program Effectiveness introduced Ms. Thalea Clay as the newest staff member of ADE-SEU. Ms. Eubanks stated that since there was a quorum present the minutes from the July 23, 2015, October 22, 2015, and January 21, 2016 meetings could be approved. The Council voted to accept the minutes as written. Nominations were made for the new Council Chair and Assistant Chair. Courtney Eubanks is the new Chair and Marylene Tate is the new Assistant Chair. The Council discussed and approved changing the meeting start time from 9:00 to 10:00 AM.

Presentation: Bonnie Boaz - Arkansas Transition Services

Arkansas Transition Services (ARS) has five consultants that serve the state and are housed at the Educational Coops. Arkansas applied to be an Intensive State with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) and was selected. NTACT will assist with the development and implementation of a technical assistance/professional development plan based on the goals and outcomes identified by Arkansas to support the improved life outcomes (graduation and post-school goals) of youth with disabilities. The Arkansas team is going to Charlotte, North Carolina, the week of May 2, 2016 for the Capacity Building Institute, where planning will begin. ARS is partnering with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services in this work, one of the goals submitted in the application to become an Intensive State is to increase the districts' use of data driven decision making. One program which is being used by six districts in Arkansas is the State Toolkit for Examining Post School Success (STEPSS). STEPSS is an

online tool for districts to examine their data within the four indicators related to transition: Graduation, Dropout rate, Quality IEPs that contain transition goals, and Post School outcomes. Once districts have reviewed the data, they can assess progress and needs to build a meaningful plan to help improve their transition programs and outcomes for students with disabilities. The districts are very motivated by the information they have obtained.

Each summer Arkansas Transition Services has summer trainings at the Coop's throughout the state. This summer they are sponsoring workshops with Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership (AITP). AITP is teaming with ARMEA to sponsor a Mental Health Conference on July 21, 2016. Dr. Eric Hartwig will be speaking on school-based mental health services for students, a universal screening tool and implications for best practice. AITP is also hosting Summer Connections (a transition fair for teachers) July 20, 2016 with nine presenting agencies, as well as agency vendors participating.

Arkansas Transition Services along with the AITP developed a Transition Resource Guide to provide information on activities and agencies to include in the transition process from birth to high school. It is available on their website: arkansastransition.com.

Presentation: Courtney Salas-Ford – Due Process Procedure

Dispute Resolution includes Due Process Hearings, State Complaints, Mediation, and IEP Facilitation.

Multiple factors have led the Special Education Unit to assess the effectiveness of its dispute resolution procedures including the number of questions and comments received about due process procedures. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued a self-assessment for dispute resolution systems that states could use to see whether or not all of the federal requirements are included in state regulations and procedures. The self-assessment has been completed and Arkansas procedures are compliant. However, IDEA sets a minimum and allows states to go beyond that minimum to ensure efficient and effective procedures.

As part of the internal assessment, a consultant was brought in to review current practices and procedures and conduct training for the hearing officers on due process hearing procedures. The Special Education Unit also contacted the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolutions in Special Education (CADRE), an OSEP funded technical assistance group, to assist in continuing to assess Arkansas's processes. A key component of the assessment is getting input from stakeholders including the Advisory Council.

The Council discussed mediations and the desire to encourage the use of mediation when disputes arise, as well as other ways to resolve disputes before they escalate. When parents, teachers, and other team members come together with the best interest of the student as the focus, disputes can be resolved more effectively.

Section Highlights:

Ms. Haley informed the Council of changes for Advisory Council meeting procedures. The Section Highlights will be on the ADE/SEU website around the same time that the agenda is posted. Council member should try to read over them before the meeting, then bring any questions to the council meeting. At the end of the meeting today Ms. Haley met with the new Council Members and review the Advisory Council Roles and Responsibilities which were presented by Mr. John Copenhaver to the Council at the October 2015 meeting. The section highlights were briefly presented and discussed.

Presentation – Jennifer Gonzales – State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP)

SSIP is a comprehensive multi-year plan which is an ambitious yet achievable plan. It is the State's plan of how to better support students with disabilities.

SSIP Phase 1 – The State's identified literacy as an area to focus improvement activities on, with support in the area of behavior and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

SSIP Phase 2 – The State has identified two comprehensive improvement strategies.

Strategy Number One: Create a system of professional development and technical assistance that is aligned with other ADE units and is differentiated based on LEAs' needs as evidenced by data.

Strategy Number Two: In collaboration with other ADE units, restructure Arkansas's Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model using evidence based professional development to implement a multi-tiered system of supports for behavior and academics, with a focus on literacy.

Special Education updates

Ms. Haley informed the Council of the ADE's Commissioner's Memo LIC-16-040 dated April 19, 2016, referencing the new teacher preparation programs for special education licensure.

The Paperwork Reduction Taskforce has identified eleven forms which will possibly be eliminated. A survey was sent to LEAs, parents, and other educators. The survey results were overwhelmingly in favor of reducing paperwork. Teachers, parents, and Disability Rights all agreed that present paperwork is very intimidating. The IEP has been streamlined and the Taskforce continues to evaluate other paperwork.

The next Advisory Council meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 27, 2016 beginning at 10:00 am.

Future agenda items:

The Council will have a planning session in July. The Council will work together in order to establish priorities for the coming year and to discuss topics for future meetings.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 pm.

Following the meeting Ms. Haley reviewed Advisory Council Roles and Responsibilities for the new Council members.

