

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, July 23, 2015.

Council Members Present:

Bobby Acklin
Sarah Allen
Kathleen Atkins
Dana Davis
Courtney Eubanks
Bill Glover
Alan McClain
Candia Nicholas
Sherry Rogers
Marylene Tate
Shaylon Ware

Special Education Staff Present:

Ella Albert
Linda Barnes
Jody Fields
Jennifer Gonzales
Lisa Haley
Christina Foley
Beverly Leonard
Rhonda Saunders
Tracy Starks
Jo Ann Weaver

Guest Present: Debra Wilson

The meeting began at 9:20 a.m. with Ms. Courtney Eubanks, Vice Chairperson, calling the Council meeting to order with the welcoming and introductions of the Advisory Council members, Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit (ADE-SEU) staff, and the guest of the meeting. Ms. Eubanks asked the Council to review the minutes from the April 23, 2015 meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. The minutes were approved.

Lisa Haley, Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Associate Director – informed the Council that the Arkansas IDEA Part B 2015 Determination from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) included results indicators in the Determination for the second consecutive year and Arkansas is in “Needs Assistance” based on results indicators for the second consecutive year.

Presentations:

Wanda Horton, Arkansas Disabilities Coalition (ADC) Director – reported that ADC is a private nonprofit organization funded by grants. ADC is a statewide independent 501c3 organization incorporated in 1976. For almost 40 years the organization has served Arkansans with disabilities and is still committed to the empowerment of individuals with disabilities and their families. ADC currently serves the entire state as the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). PTI for Arkansas is a rich source of information and training for parents of children with disabilities, including parents of children with disabilities who are underserved, have limited English proficiency, have-at-risk youth with disabilities, or parents who also have a

disability. ADC supports families of children with disabilities from birth to 26 years with information, resources, and advocacy assistance. ADC uses an Informed Effective Parent (IEP) concept. Individuals are provided assistance through group trainings on topics such as their rights, responsibilities, and roles under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The ADC staff is primarily composed of parents of children with disabilities, which brings a personal prospective to ADC's mission and work. All Arkansas Disability Coalition Services are free.

The Family-2-Family Health Information Center (F2F) is another program offered through ADC in a one-on-one or group setting. The F2F program for Arkansas assists and educates families of children and youth with special health care needs and the professionals who serve them by providing health-related information, resources, support and training.

Candia Nicholas – Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC) Parent Director – spoke to the council regarding the Family Support Program and Northwest Arkansas Community Parent Resource Center located in Springdale, Arkansas. Services are provided for children birth to age 26 in Northwest Arkansas, which covers Benton, Carroll, Madison, and Washington counties. Trainings and workshops are offered in English, Spanish, and Marshallese; information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 is provided. Training includes transition preparedness and planning for preschool to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, and high school to adult services. All trainings and workshops include effective communication and advocacy techniques.

All trainings are available online at www.nwacprc.org in English, Spanish, and Marshallese. There is also a full resource library available to the area schools covering a variety of topics. The goal of CPRC is to support parents, caregivers, and self-advocates in their journey toward becoming effective advocates. CPRC areas of emphasis include parents of children with disabilities, foster parents, parents of children with dual diagnosis (mental and developmental disabilities), parents of children within the judicial system, and professionals working with these families.

Angela Cramers and Lisa Dierks, Best Buddies Arkansas – informed the council that Best Buddies' mission is to establish a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment and leadership development for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Best Buddies Arkansas is the 24th state to open an office. The state office opened in December 2014, and there are currently four official Best Buddies friendship chapters in Arkansas. Best Buddies partner college and high school students with disabled youth and the "heart" of Best Buddies is the one-on-one relationships and friendships developed through the program.

Dr. Jody Fields, IDEA Data and Research Director – Presented on a partnership with the ADE School Improvement Unit. A Risk Assessment will be used to determine technical assistance and monitoring needs for LEAs, and the two units will coordinate efforts to provide appropriate services and supports.

Dr. Fields also discussed the Success Gap Rubric, which was piloted with LEAs that were identified as being at risk for disproportionate representation for three or more years, and required to expend Part B funds for Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS).

Jean Cole, Blytheville School District, LEA Supervisor – spoke to the council about her district’s implementation of the Success Gap Rubric for disproportionality in discipline. Ms. Cole stated that Blytheville School District has one of the highest rates in Arkansas for out-of-school suspension of black males in special education. This has created a sense of urgency that has led to implementation of an intensive program to address the high rates of out-of-school suspensions.

Jennifer Gonzales, State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) Coordinator – discussed “Engaging Stakeholders Around SSIP” with the council. The Arkansas Department of Education State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) will focus on building state capacity to support LEAs with the implementation of evidence-based practices that will lead to measured improvement in the state-identified measurable result (SIMR) - increasing the literacy achievement of students with disabilities (SWD). Ms. Gonzales stated that it is not only important to recognize students who are proficient, but also students who are making gains toward proficiency. An extensive data and infrastructure analysis was conducted in collaboration with multiple internal and external stakeholders in order to identify the SIMR focus of literacy. A tiered monitoring system and special education professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) system will provide the necessary structures for how LEA services and supports will be identified, managed, and differentiated at the State-level. These systems will be critical in building state-level capacity through the alignment and coordination of existing resources and initiatives.

Courtney Salas-Ford, Dispute Resolution Administrator – updated the council on recent legislation that affects special education. Companion Acts 410 and 931, Building Better Futures Program and Building Better Futures High School Program are targeted for students with intellectual disabilities to have higher education experiences.

Act 839 Legislative Task Force on Best Practices for Special Education will consist of 22 members. Lisa Haley will be one of the members representing the Special Education Unit. The task force will study and research ways to improve special education and how special education can positively impact achievement outcomes.

Act 1178 Succeed Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities will begin awarding scholarships during the 2016-2017 school year. Eligible students must be currently enrolled in a public school and have attended public school for at least one full academic year. Students must have an IEP and be accepted into an approved private school to be eligible, and the district must be notified sixty days before the first scholarship payment. The private school must meet state requirements of the standards of accreditation, and the Rules for the Succeed Scholarship Program are currently being drafted.

Attorney General Opinion 2015-027 was issued June 11, 2015. Arkansas Code Ann. 6-41-203: “A child with a disability” means a person between three (3) and twenty-one (21) years of age

(...)." Response: "In my opinion, existing law is equivocal on the question, but the Arkansas Department of Education may continue to apply the law as if it reads "3 to 21"."

Section Reports: Due to the time the Section Reports were not presented.

Future agenda items: None

Ms. Eubanks stated that the next meeting will be October 22, 2015, at 9:00 a.m.

A motion was made by Sarah Allen and seconded by Dana Davis to adjourn the meeting at 2:45 p.m.