

**VIRGINIA STATE SPECIAL  
EDUCATION  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REPORT**

**July 2007- April 2008**

**Approved October 23, 2008**

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Committee Organization .....	4
Meetings .....	5
▪ Public Comments .....	6
▪ Constituency Reports .....	7
Issues Addressed by the Subcommittees of the SSEAC .....	8
▪ Personnel.....	8
▪ Constituency Involvement.....	8
▪ Policy and Regulation .....	10
▪ Data and Reports .....	10
Other Issues .....	11
▪ Response to Intervention .....	11
▪ The Schools for the Deaf and Blind.....	11
▪ Assessment and Accountability.....	11
▪ Continuous Improvement Monitoring.....	11
▪ Virginia Accessible Instructional Materials Center.....	11
▪ Access to General Curriculum .....	12
▪ Youth Self-determination .....	12
▪ Autism.....	12
Future Issues .....	13
▪ Autism.....	13
▪ Regulatory Process .....	13
▪ Response to Intervention (Rtl) .....	13
▪ Evidence Based Instruction .....	13
▪ Personnel Development .....	13
▪ Assessment, Accountability, and Academic Achievement.....	14
▪ State Performance Plan.....	14
▪ Committee Organization .....	14
SSEAC Membership.....	15

## INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state establish and maintain a state advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the state. The statute specifies membership and requires that a majority of members be individuals with disabilities or parents of students with disabilities. Specifically, the following is required:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state establish and maintain a state advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the state. The statute specifies membership and requires that a majority of members be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities, specifically, the statute requires the following:

- “(i) parents of children with disabilities (ages birth through 26);
- (ii) individuals with disabilities;
- (iii) teachers;
- (iv) representatives of institutions of higher education that prepare special education and related services personnel;
- (v) State and local education officials, including officials who carry out activities under subtitle B of title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq.);
- (vi) administrators of programs for children with disabilities;
- (vii) representatives of other State agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities;
- (viii) representatives of private schools and public charter schools;
- (ix) not less than 1 representative of a vocational community, or business organization concerned with the provision of transition services to children with disabilities;
- (x) a representative from the State child welfare agency responsible for foster care; and
- (xi) representatives from the State juvenile and adult corrections agencies.”

In Virginia, the panel is known as the State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC).

# COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION

The activities of the Virginia State Special Education Committee (SSEAC) are governed by the Virginia Board of Education bylaws for advisory committees. The SSEAC year commences on July 1 and ends on July 30 of the following calendar year. An executive committee works with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff in establishing priorities and agenda items for future SSEAC meetings. The SSEAC delegates various subcommittees to monitor programmatic issues and future items of concern. The subcommittee structure conforms to the federal requirements of the State Performance Plan, the process of Virginia regulatory changes, and the monitoring of NCLB requirements. This structure blends into the process of the Priority Projects as well.

## **STANDING SUBCOMMITTEES**

Executive  
Nominating  
State Operated Programs  
Policy & Regulation

## **ADHOC SUBCOMMITTEES**

Data & Reports  
Constituency Involvement  
Personnel

Staff members serve as consultants to each of the subcommittees, providing technical assistance, clarification of Department of Education procedures, and additional information.

SSEAC members are assigned a minimum of one standing and one Ad Hoc subcommittee to promote each member's expertise, interest, and concerns. Each executive committee member serves as a chair for a subcommittee. Subcommittees meet independently and make recommendations to the full committee. Such recommendations may include: further study with additional information from the VDOE or referral to the Board of Education through written communications or public comment.

## **DATA & REPORTS**

This committee reviews special education data collected by the VDOE and provides assistance in reporting the data to the public. The committee members may also serve on stakeholder groups of the Department or other taskforce groups.

## **CONSTITUENCY INVOLVEMENT**

This subcommittee addresses the ways to involve parents, students, and other community constituents in SSEAC activities as well as in local special education training and parent involvement activities.

## **PERSONNEL**

This committee addresses concerns regarding the availability of fully licensed, highly qualified special education teachers and related service providers, in addition to the caseload requirements of service provision.

## MEETINGS

The full committee meets in regular session four times each year, while subcommittees and the executive committee meet as necessary to fulfill their responsibilities to the SSEAC. Every effort is made to consolidate the work of subcommittees to the regular session. All regular meetings are open to the public, as well as any subcommittee work sessions. The public is offered an opportunity to make comment during specified time allotments at each meeting. All meetings are recorded to assist with record keeping and the recordings are maintained by the VDOE in accordance with record keeping policies and procedures.

The committee continues the practice of conducting the meetings across the state. The SSEAC met this year as follows:

July 18-19: Richmond  
October 23-24: Lynchburg  
January 24-25: Richmond  
April 16-18: Blacksburg

With the exception of the January meeting, evening public forums were held for the informal exchange between the public and committee members. Attendance continues to vary according to locations outside the Richmond area, but we are scheduled to provide this opportunity for the upcoming year. The October review of the two-year calendar may prompt some change to this process. The SSEAC distributes a flyer to notify the citizens of Virginia of an upcoming meeting, and members are given copies for distribution to their constituency groups. In addition, the SSEAC, in coordination with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, supports and assists in formation of a database of constituents interested in special education and information sharing. The information from each flyer is distributed through this shared network, named Virginia Special Education Network (VSEN).

Two regional meetings are planned for the following year. The meeting dates and general locations are:

July 17-18: Richmond  
October 23-24: Warrenton area  
February 5-6: Richmond  
April 23-24: Williamsburg area

In the event of a change to the schedule, the VSEN, the VDOE, and regional flyers will note the changes.

The SOP subcommittee met May 8, 2008 to review the policies and procedures of the state operated programs and the Virginia Schools for the Deaf, Blind, and Multi-disabled.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

At each meeting, a public comment period was held. The SSEAC provides feedback to the nature of the concerns through review and assistance from VDOE staff. Operationally, the SSEAC reviews the previous meeting's comments with the actions of department staff. During the 2007-2008 year, public comments were:

- Introduction of PEATC's IEP Facilitator Initiative;
- Concerns of inadequate educational supports in inclusive settings;
- Positive inclusive practices varying from school to school within a division;
- Difficulties experienced in taking the SOL writing assessment under VGLA;
- An honors student graduating with a modified standard diploma after passing all of the required SOL assessments with exception of the English R.R. SOL;
- Inaccuracies of transcriptions for Braille textbooks;
- Difficulty of accommodations for the national tests (PSAT, SAT, AP);
- Increased contacts with PEAT re: due process, eligibility, and measurable IAP goals;
- Continued lack of appropriate training for school personnel working with students with autism and general lack of knowledge regarding the rights of those students;
- Numerous comments of support for the Virginia Coalition for Students with Disabilities public comment regarding the proposed regulations;
- Need to increase graduation rate of students with disabilities;
- Numerous comments regarding the parental consent changes in the proposed regulations;
- Lack of adequate TBVI services and assessments;
- Formation of a grassroots group named Supporting Inclusive Education for All (SEIFA);
- Lack of services to Spanish speaking families throughout Virginia.
- Lack of a general restraint policy;
- Poor utilization of functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention planning and implementation;
- Issues of educational discrimination;
- Numerous comments addressing the Governor's public discussion regarding the proposed regulations.

## **CONSTITUENCY REPORTS**

Each meeting provided an opportunity for the SSEAC members to represent concerns in their respective constituencies. During the 2007-2008 year the following issues were included:

- PEATC's Latino Outreach and CSI transition booklet (Clue for Self Investigation for Middle School Students with Disabilities)
- Increased interest in self-determination and self-advocacy beginning in elementary school
- Challenging SOP and LEA coordination re: school records, IEPs, SOL assessments, and provision of related services in private settings
- Maintaining licensed teachers in private school settings
- Shortage of teachers, too many provisionally licensed teachers, and particular shortages in Speech/Language, ECSE, and Hearing Impaired
- Retention of licensed/licensable teachers, recruitment
- Reports of some divisions not providing services
- Increased activity by LEAs for baseline data collection in the area of transition
- New licensure regulations causing modifications of programs
- Changes in the use of 'mental retardation' to 'intellectual disability'
- National Inclusive Schools Week and Exceptional Children's Week celebrated with diversity trainings, disability awareness curriculums, in various regions
- Increased identification of autism spectrum disorders and preparations OT service providers through staff development
- Constituency groups throughout the state providing comment to the proposed regulations
- Inclusion models at the secondary level presenting challenges to instruction across multiple grade levels, focused instruction aligned with SOLs for multiple school placements
- Project Search being piloted in Region I
- VI in the consortium, no longer a separate area
- Shortage of speech/language providers due to 'total language' approach
- Shortages of licensed nurses affecting medical care in the schools
- "A Life For Me" developed, a self-advocacy program through the Partnership for People with Disabilities
- Transition services not timely and lacking parental involvement
- Disability harassment by staff in one location
- Dual enrollment in college and high school for students with disabilities.
- CEC training discounts for VEA members

During the 2006-2007 year, the SSEAC continues its role working with the VDOE and monitoring the State Performance Plan, Virginia Standards of Quality, and other VDOE initiatives.

## **ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE SUBCOMMITTEES OF THE SSEAC**

### **PERSONNEL**

The personnel subcommittee completed a significant amount of work last year in the area of licensure. During the current year, institutions of higher education (IHE) have been modifying their programs to align with the new licensure requirements, therefore there have been few issues raised related to licensure and personnel preparation this year.

The three areas that the committee worked on during the current year were: increasing personnel development addressing autism, promoting a statewide special education leadership program, and exploring IEP facilitation training. The personnel subcommittee supports exploring training that would increase peoples' skills to facilitate IEP meetings. The personnel subcommittee supports the active Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) involvement in the State Autism Council, which has encouraged an increasing number of IHEs to offer programs that use the *Skill Competencies for Professionals and Paraprofessionals in Virginia Supporting Individuals with Autism Across the Lifespan*. Currently there are four (4) IHEs (Longwood University, Lynchburg University, Regent University, and Virginia Commonwealth University) that offer four or more courses addressing all categories of the *Skill Competencies*. Other Virginia IHEs offer course work on evidence-based practices. The Virginia Department of Education's Training/Technical Assistance Centers (T/TACs) provide information and workshops on a statewide basis. The personnel subcommittee continues to seek current information about professional development in the area of autism to identify gaps.

As recommended by the personnel subcommittee, the VDOE initiated the special education leadership initiative. The program will host the first cohort group of aspiring special education leaders beginning in fall 2008. Approximately 30 nominated candidates will be selected for participation, who aspire to be in a leadership position in the future. Seminars and field experiences are planned to address current and future issues for providing leadership in special education. The year-long experience is designed to augment administrator preparation, as it would not yield an endorsement. IHEs will be asked to consider the experience for awarding college credit toward an administrative endorsement.

### **CONSTITUENCY INVOLVEMENT**

The subcommittee addresses the ways to involve parents, students, and other community constituents in SSEAC activities as well as in local special education training and parent involvement activities.

The Department of Education continues to send a meeting flyer to local special education directors, parent resource centers, and local special education advisory committee chairs based on the region in which the meeting is planned. The flyer is distributed at least one

month prior to the meeting date. In addition, based on a recommendation by the subcommittee, the SSEAC voted to support a partnership with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) to develop and maintain a database of contact information for individuals interested in special education. The database of individuals is known as the Virginia Special Education Network or VSEN.

The VBPD kicked off this partnership with: a direct mail effort to the local SEAC list that was obtained from VDOE last year (approximately 2,000 individuals); a published announcement/invitation for the VSEN on the VBPD website (<http://www.vaboard.org/vsenform.htm>); a short article in the VBPD August Voices & Visions newsletter (<http://www.vaboard.org/downloads/VVAug07.pdf>), circulation of approximately 6,000); and an e-mail announcement to the VBPD statewide contact list (approximately 2,700 unique e-mail addresses). The State Special Education Advisory Committee assisted in their effort by sharing the sign-up/participant lists collected at its public comment and forum opportunities with VBPD. A copy of an outreach document created by the VBPD is attached.

Over the past year these efforts have resulted in the registrations of over 900 VSEN members. These members come from every corner of the state and every type of community from major cities to rural counties, and include past, present, and aspiring local SEAC members, other family members of students with disabilities, special education & “regular” education teachers, local administrators, consultants & advisors, transition specialists & rehabilitation counselors, other related service providers, and advocates from the local to the state level. In addition, those who signed up for the VSEN were more than 90% new registrants that were not a part of any previous VBPD or SSEAC lists. The creation of the VSEN therefore has greatly expanded the grassroots outreach for both the VBPD and SSEAC.

Through the partnership with the VBPD the SSEAC has been able to: share SSEAC meeting information to a large group of individuals interested in special education issues, share information and obtain feedback from those individuals regarding special education matters – e.g. the VDOE Parent Involvement Survey, and DOE regulations. Building on these initial steps, further collaboration will be sought to outreach to those who are interested in the state special education matters.

Finally, the SSEAC remains committed to meeting in various regions of the state to afford opportunity for involvement in public forum and public comment by persons interested in special education issues. Such interaction is only possible in these venues, and is a critical aspect of the SSEAC outreach effort to local communities.

## **POLICY AND REGULATION**

During the 2007-2008, the Policy & Regulation subcommittee met several times in addition to the regularly scheduled work sessions of our full SSEAC meeting. The subcommittee began drafting the SSEAC public comment of the proposed regulations at a January 2008 meeting, with further committee work in March at the VDOE office. The committee met again on April 16 for six additional hours of discussion. At the April 17 full committee meeting the subcommittee presented a public comment that was voted on by the representation present. Through vigorous debate, a compromise was reached that would be presented to the Board of Education. The document is attached as Appendix B. This committee will remain committed to examination of the regulatory process as it moves forward into the final phase of the process.

The subcommittee also reviewed the reports of the Dispute Resolution and Hearings, with discussion of management of hearings, court decisions, and trends that may be identified in individual regions. The annual report is shared with the full committee.

## **DATA & REPORTS**

During 2007-2008, the Data and Reports sub-committee met regularly. This committee was charged with the task of assessing the presentation of information to the public to identify whether it was clear and accessible. The sub-committee identified that data is of significant importance and should be included as a regular agenda item during the full SSEAC meeting. The Data and Reports Committee respectfully recommended the group be disbanded due to successful completion of the charge as assigned. SSEAC members continued to participate with stakeholder groups as part of the SPP-APR ongoing work.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

### **RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION**

The SSEAC continued to follow the RTI initiatives as the department progresses with strategies. Because of proposed regulatory changes to special education services, especially the proposal to eliminate the child study committees, the SSEAC recommended the formation of a new subcommittee that will monitor the implementation, guidelines development, and training opportunities throughout the state.

### **THE SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF & BLIND**

The SSEAC received updates regarding the changes occurring at the Hampton School and specifically the transition to day programming for the Hampton Roads students. We will monitor the transition to the new academic year at that site as well as the renovations at the Staunton campus.

### **ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Throughout the reporting year, the SSEAC continued its review of participation and performance of students with disabilities within the available assessments administered in the state of Virginia. Background and early planning of the development of The Virginia Modified Achievement Standard Test (VMAST) was introduced to the committee and will be monitored as completion and pilot testing proceeds. The SSEAC is represented on the steering committee of this new assessment tool.

### **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MONITORING**

The SSEAC reviewed the process of federal monitoring of special education services and the relationship of school division's performance against the indicators of the Annual Performance Report. The committee will monitor the performance through the continued reporting from the APR.

### **VIRGINIA ACCESSIBLE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS CENTER**

The SSEAC was informed of Virginia's initiative to address the federal requirements for accessible instructional materials to students with disabilities to students with disabilities. A center has been established at George Mason University to process textbooks and other instructional materials requested by local divisions into various formats including talking books and Braille. These materials will be able to all school divisions. The SSEAC will follow the implementation of the center during the upcoming academic year.

## **ACCESS TO GENERAL CURRICULUM**

The volume of public comment directed toward the accessibility of general curriculum in the least restrictive environment prompted several discussions and presentations of inclusive practices throughout the state. The SSEAC will continue to focus on the programming, staff development, and accountability of students with disabilities in least restrictive environments receiving full access to general curriculum instruction. Appropriate accommodations, improved access to instructional specialists, and appropriate assessment are ongoing concerns to be pursued on a regular basis.

## **YOUTH SELF-DETERMINATION**

The SSEAC received an overview of the self advocacy and self determination projects being implemented throughout the state. Middle school transition plans were also linked into those projects. The SSEAC continues to support the promotion of the increased involvement of self advocates.

## **AUTISM**

The previous ad hoc subcommittee on Autism and the SSEAC supported VDOE updating its technical assistance resource document on Extended School Year. This project was completed in December 2007.

## **FUTURE ISSUES**

Listed below are areas on which the SSEAC will continue to monitor and advise the Virginia Department of Education and the Board of Education as they work for the families and students of Virginia.

### **AUTISM**

The SSEAC has intensely monitored the educational issues related to instructional strategies of this unique population of students. The increased identification of autism spectrum disorders as well as the requirement for continual staff development for educational curriculum access will be emphasized during the task assignments of this committee. The Personnel subcommittee will be charged with this activity.

### **REGULATORY PROCESS**

The Policy & Regulations subcommittee will be charged to monitor the completion of the regulatory process, as well as the distribution of regulations manuals throughout the school divisions. The SSEAC will continue to focus efforts towards parent education and training on the new regulations. Reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) will be monitored as well.

### **RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RtI)**

The SSEAC will form an ad hoc subcommittee to process the RtI initiatives throughout the state, and be charged with reporting those activities at each full committee meeting.

### **EVIDENCE BASED INSTRUCTION**

Reading and math curriculum programming affects numerous aspects of performance of assessment standards and diploma status of students with disabilities. As the committee explores the intervention strategies of instructional support and the content literacy continuum being piloted, future direction in staff development may be enhanced through these interventions. Instruction in addressing positive behaviors in schools is also important for increasing opportunities for students to access instruction and minimize negative discipline practices.

### **PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT**

The SSEAC will continue to monitor the needs for highly qualified teaching staff throughout the state. The staffing standards will be monitored for greater student accommodations.

## **ASSESSMENT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

The SSEAC will continue to monitor the number of students participating in the identified assessments administered in the state of Virginia, as well as the pilot of the new VMAST. The SSEAC will also monitor the graduation rates and diploma status of graduates.

## **STATE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

The Data & Reports subcommittee expired in this reporting period because of the need to provide an ongoing overview addressing the data and indicators of the SPP. The performance data will be presented to the full committee at each scheduled meeting

## **COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION**

The SSEAC requires stability of its membership in order to be productive. Due to the expiration of terms as well as unforeseen resignations, the SSEAC will participate in team building activities to foster collaboration.

## SSEAC MEMBERSHIP

**Judy M. Averill**

*(Transition/Vocational Education)*

**Michael M. Behrmann**

*(Higher Education)*

**Suzanne Bowers**

*(Parent, Region 4 – N. Virginia)*

**Robert T. Chappell**

*(Local Education Official)*

**Susanne Conroy**

*(Parent, Region 7 – Southwest)*

**Mary Anne Discenza**

*(State Agency)*

**Christina Draper**

**Mona Holmes**

*(Parent, Region 5 – Shenandoah Valley)*

**Sharon Duncan**

*(Parent, Region 6 – Roanoke area)*

**Anne Fischer**

*(Parent, Region 2 – lower Tidewater)*

**Carol Hamilton**

*(Parent, Region 8 – Southside)*

**Melodie M. Henderson**

*(Teacher)*

**Cindy Mills**

*(Private Schools)*

**Jacqueline Nelson**

*(Correctional (DCE)*

*Richmond, VA 23219*

**Peter Squire**

*(Person with Disability)*

**Tamara Temoney**

*(Foster Care (DSS))*

**Robert Whytal**

*(Special Education Director)*

**Carletta Pittman Wilson**

*(Parent, Region 1 – Richmond area)*