

VIRGINIA STATE  
SPECIAL EDUCATION  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2015 - JUNE 2016

# 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 federal regulations specify membership and requires that a majority of members be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. Specifically, the regulations require the following membership:

- “(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 one 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.”

(34 CFR 300.167 through 34 CFR 300.169)

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

## COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION

The activities of the Virginia State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC) are governed by the Virginia Board of Education bylaws for advisory committees. The SSEAC year commences on July 1 and ends on June 30 of the following calendar year. Committee members work with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff in establishing priorities and agenda items for SSEAC meetings. The SSEAC delegates various subcommittees to monitor programmatic issues and future items of concern. For the 2015-2016 year, the subcommittees were structured as follows:

### STANDING SUBCOMMITTEES

Five standing subcommittees are used to conduct the much of the work of the SSEAC. These include Executive, Nominating, Achievement, Outcome, and Policy and Regulations. The five subcommittees are consistent with the priorities of the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, and the SSEAC supports the VDOE's focus on these priorities.

SSEAC members are each assigned to subcommittees based upon each member's expertise, interests, and concerns. Each subcommittee is chaired by a member of the executive committee. Subcommittees make recommendations to the full committee. Such recommendations may result in further study with additional information from the VDOE, presentations to the SSEAC, or inclusion in the SSEAC's Annual Report to the Board of Education. VDOE personnel serve as consultants to each of the subcommittees, providing technical assistance, clarification of Department of Education policies and procedures, and additional information.

**Executive** - The Executive Subcommittee includes the Chair, the Vice-chair, the Secretary, and three At-large members. The committee establishes priorities for meeting agendas and provides overall direction to the SSEAC.

**Nominating** - The Nominating Subcommittee is charged with nominating a slate of nominations for Executive Subcommittee vacancies.

**Policy and Regulations** - This subcommittee focuses on initiatives at the state level that either result in policy and regulations or have an impact on policy and regulations as they pertain to students with disabilities.

**Student Outcomes** - This subcommittee focuses on data relative to the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). This subcommittee conducts specific analysis around identified areas of concern including dropout rates, graduation rates, transition, discipline of students with disabilities, and assessment.

**Student Achievement** - This subcommittee focuses on achievement data and the goals under the state plan for students with disabilities. This subcommittee focuses not only on the federal expectations, but also on the growth in achievement for students with disabilities and strategies that are being promoted at the state level to meet expectations.

## **MEETINGS**

The full committee meets in regular session at least four times annually. Subcommittees meet during the regular sessions and as necessary to fulfill their responsibilities to the SSEAC. Every effort is made to consolidate the work of subcommittees with the regular sessions. All meetings and work sessions are open to the public. The public is offered an opportunity to make comment during a specified time allotted in the agenda at each regular meeting.

During the 2015-2016 year, meetings were held in the Richmond area on the following dates:

- July 22-24, 2015
- October 1-2, 2015
- December 3-4, 2015
- April 7-8, 2016

Meetings scheduled for the remainder of 2016 includes:

- October 13-14, 2016
- December 1-2, 2016

## **PRESENTATIONS**

Each meeting included presentations, including updates on the status of numerous projects, state and federal legislation, funding initiatives, and other information related to services to students with disabilities. These presentations provided the basis for much of the subcommittee work as well as the desire to have additional presentations on specific topics.

Presentations were provided by VDOE staff or state funded projects. Topics included:

- Updates on the Promulgation of Restraint and Seclusion Regulations
- Aspiring Special Education Leaders Academy
- Update on Virginia Tiered System of Supports
- Information about Including Me in Virginia
- School Improvement Update
- Report on the Use of State Complaints and Conflict Resolution
- Update on the Status of Statewide IEP Program
- Report on the Annual Plan/Application for Federal Funds by State Operated Programs
- Update on Transition Activities
- Legislative Update

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

A public comment period was held at each meeting, and the SSEAC members always appreciate the time and effort that it takes to for a member of the public to attend a meeting and/or provide a comment. During the 2015-2016 year, public comments were related to:

- The need to increase the use of inclusive education for students with disabilities
- Dyslexia and need for appropriate instruction, training for teachers, and the lack of teaching materials for students with dyslexia
- The role of advocates in schools and the exclusion of advocates

- The need for better use of assistive technology

## **ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH CONSTITUENCY REPORTS**

Each member of the SSEAC was provided an opportunity at each meeting to report on activities and/or issues from their constituency groups. The following issues were reported during the past year:

- Difficulty with recruitment of local SEAC members and/or large turnover of members.
- Confusion regarding certificates versus diplomas for students with disabilities.
- The need for a consistent statewide IEP system that would be particularly helpful for students who transfer from one school division to another.
- Inconsistent delivery of inclusive education.
- Inappropriateness of SOL/ASOL for students no longer eligible for the VAAP or VSEP.
- Lack of parental understanding about IEPs and how the process works.
- School budget shortfalls and anticipated impact on services to students with disabilities.
- Transition from elementary to middle school and the lack of supports at the middle school
- Adaptive physical education accommodations for students with disabilities
- Lack of social skills curriculum
- Inconsistencies among school divisions and between schools for IEP development and implementation
- Inconsistencies on the use of inclusive options
- The special education add-on endorsement for general education teacher licensure does not include collaboration for the implementation of inclusive education
- The special education add-on endorsement for general education teacher licensure does not include classroom and behavior management
- Overuse of testing and lack of alternatives
- Lack of training for general education teachers for the inclusion of special education students
- Caseloads for special education teachers are too high
- Accountability system for teachers may negatively impact how general education teachers approach working with students with disabilities.
- Concern over lack of advanced notification for parents, teachers, and students when a student will be pulled for triennial testing.

## **COMMENDATIONS**

The SSEAC wishes to take this opportunity to first recognize the leadership and advocacy for children with special needs by Mr. John Eisenberg. Through his leadership, a number of programs and resources supported by the Board of Education have been implemented to improve services to students with disabilities. In particular, we would like to commend the Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education on the following:

- a) Continuing the I'm Determined project which just had its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.
- b) Continuing the academies and demonstration sites for Co-teaching.
- c) Supporting work performed by the Inclusion Project Steering Committee.
- d) Moving forward on the development of regulations governing restraint and seclusion in public schools, given the passage of §22.1-279.1:1. The SSEAC has appreciated the opportunity to be involved in the development of the regulations.

- e) Creating state-sponsored professional development opportunities for teachers to learn more about dyslexia and research-based interventions such as Orton-Gillingham.
- f) Bringing together different stakeholders to discuss the needs and concerns for inclusive education in Virginia.
- g) Continuing the work on the Applied Studies diploma.
- h) Continuing to support transition activities such as Project Search and the Center for Transition Innovations.
- i) Partnering with the Parent Training and Information Center to host advocacy symposiums for two years to increase collaboration between the public schools and advocates.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on public comments, reports from members representing their constituency groups, and other information presented to the committee, the SSEAC makes the following recommendations to the Board of Education.

The ultimate goal for students with disabilities is integrated competitive employment and one way to achieve that goal is to see that as many students as possible receive an advanced or standard diploma and that the applied studies diploma is rigorous in its requirements. Completion of rigorous diploma requirements requires that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who do not have disabilities. As such, all of the following recommendations are in support of that goal.

1. Utilizing current initiatives, identify and highlight inclusive education practices with efforts to understand how the special educational needs of students with disabilities are being met in general education settings with appropriate supports, including extracurricular activities/programs, to increase understanding alongside data from Indicator 5 of the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR).
2. Increase access for students with disabilities to higher education, Workforce Readiness, and Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs and credentials (ensuring that those classes are being offered).
3. Identify school divisions who are providing exceptional best practices in inclusion and utilize existing platforms (e.g. social media, press releases to news agencies, teacher direct, and superintendent's memos) that facilitate sharing and reinforce best practices through this recognition.
4. Develop guidance on the use of Universal Design for Learning, both as a part of Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports as well as in the general education classroom to move forward with inclusive practices.
5. Create training and guidance to inform families and school personnel, beginning at the elementary level, regarding the use of different state-mandated tests and their implications for diploma options.

6. Provide capacity-building professional development to address the use of functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plans, collaborative problem solving, assistive technology, and creating safe/nurturing/inclusive school communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

The SSEAC appreciates the opportunity to provide advice to the Board of Education and hopes that the recommendations are implemented without delay. While we recognize the many competing requests for resources, we feel that these requests are reasonable. We look forward to a response from the Board of Education.



# State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC) 2016 Annual Report



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## Committee Organization

- **Full Committee**
  - Represents various stakeholder groups including Standing Subcommittees
  - Required by state and federal regulations
  - Purpose is to advise the Board of Education
- **The SSEAC year commences on July 1 and ends on June 30.**



## Committee Organization

- The SSEAC delegates various subcommittees to monitor programmatic issues and future items of concern. For the 2014 - 2015 year, the subcommittees included:
  - Executive
  - Nominating
  - Policy and Regulations
  - Student Outcomes
  - Student Achievement



## Meeting Dates and Location

**Meetings were held in Richmond on the following dates:**

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## **Presentations**

- **Updates on the Promulgation of Restraint and Seclusion Regulations**
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- **Update on Transition Activities**
- **Legislative Update**
- **Updates on state initiatives**



## **Public Comments**

- **The need to increase the use of inclusive education for students with disabilities**
- **Dyslexia and need for appropriate instruction, training for teachers, and the lack of teaching materials for students with dyslexia**
- **The role of advocates in schools and the exclusion of advocates**
- **The need for better use of assistive technology**



## Issues Identified - Constituency Reports

- Difficulty with recruitment of local SEAC members and/or large turnover of members.
- Confusion regarding certificates versus diplomas for students with disabilities.
- The need for a consistent statewide IEP system that would be particularly helpful for students who transfer from one school division to another.
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## Recommendations

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## Recommendations

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## *Thank You*

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