

STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SSEAC) ANNUAL REPORT

July 2023 - June 2024



STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The purpose of the State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC) is to promote the education of children with disabilities by providing advice and policy guidance based on input from citizens and constituent groups. The SSEAC is organized and functions in accordance with state and federal requirements.

- Represents various stakeholder groups as prescribed by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*
- Administrative year runs July 1 - June 30
- Four subcommittees
- Four meetings

PUBLIC COMMENT AND CONSTITUENCY REPORT THEMES

- Perceived bias in the due process against parents and hearing officers
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation of procedural safeguards, lack of progress monitoring, and measurable goals
- Teacher recruitment and retention, as well as staff shortages and compensation
- Mental health/stress/fatigue of students, staff, and parents
- Lack of mental health/wrap-around services for the social-emotional needs of students
- Continued impact of the pandemic on students with disabilities

PRESENTATION TOPICS AND PRESENTERS

- Annual Plan Review for VSDB, Tracie Coleman, Director of Special Education Finance and Budget (FAB)
- Annual Report on Dispute Resolution, Patricia Haymes, Director, Office of Dispute Resolution
- Ombudsman Report on Constituency Issues, Peter Grabowski, Special Education Ombudsman
- FOIA Presentation, Alan Gernhardt, Esq., Executive Director
- Postsecondary Access and Success Specialist, Brittney Everett, Virginia Department of Education
- Virginia IEP Update, Andrew Greenidge, Coordinator, Special Projects and Program Improvement
- Teacher Recruitment and Retention Update, Rob Gilstrap, Assistant Superintendent for Education Preparation
- Secondary Transition-Partnerships that Work, Marianne Moore and Matt Luther
- Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), Dan Dunham, Military Student and Families Specialist
- Center for Family Involvement-Family Navigators, Nickie Brandenburger and Renee Soniat
- SSEAC overview, Hank Millward and Dr. Chiquita Seaborne
- Regular updates on the State of the State, Dr. Samantha Hollins, Assistant Superintendent of Special Populations

COMMENDATIONS

- Turning the Tide recruitment program using all modes of media and recruiting nationwide
- Standards-based IEP Technical Assistance
- Updated Eligibility Determination Documents and family-friendly resources to support
- The recent JLARC study on school finance provided insight into special education funding
- The release of the new VAAP Decision-Making tool
- The continued and unwavering support of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff

RECOMMENDATIONS: FUNDING, TEACHER PAY, AND LICENSURE

- Consideration to be given to funding special education based on student needs as opposed to the utilization of the Standards of Quality formula.
- As additional positions and requirements are mandated by the General Assembly, we recommend they be fully funded through the state funding formula.
- We are in full support of additional funding to support our students who receive special education services.
- We recommend the barriers preventing high school graduates from pursuing the teaching profession be examined.
- We recommend supporting localities to incentivize teachers to become dual-certified or specialize in special education.
- We recommend consideration for localities to enable higher compensation for teachers with more experience and consideration of strategies regarding equitable regional pay to avoid losing teachers to neighboring school systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS: STUDENT AND FAMILY SUPPORT

- The SSEAC requests that VDOE consider providing an annual summary by issue of filed due process complaints in order to further assist SSEAC in performing its statutorily required duty of identifying trends in the issues being raised by parents of students with disabilities in the Commonwealth.
- We support ongoing training for families by VDOE to help them understand the VAAP Decision-Making tool and would like to see online training materials available to local SEACs and other parent groups.
- •The SSEAC recommends that VDOE ensure that if a locality uses Virginia IEP and has optional add-ons, that those comply with IDEA parent participation requirements, specifically that parents are able to access their student's information and increase their participation in the IEP process.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ASSESSMENT AND PERFORMANCE

- We recommend that the department supports school divisions in ensuring their IEP teams consider the appropriate provision of the read-aloud accommodation based on the specific needs of the student.
- The SSEAC recognizes that growth assessments are a useful tool in capturing performance of students with disabilities and encourage the use of this data for local school division planning and reporting.
- We recommend that the writing SOL requirement for graduation be more individualized, allowing the IEP Team to choose an alternative assessment that best supports that student. A criterion should be developed to allow the students to take the Work Keys Assessment, as an alternative to the SOL.

State Special Education Advisory Committee

ANNUAL REPORT
SSEAC@virginia.gov

Special thanks to you, our Virginia Board of Education, for your support of our special education students and families!

