



Georgia
State Advisory Panel
for
Special Education

Annual Report

2011-2012

Nancy Woods, Chair

Linda Meiring, Vice-Chair

Introduction:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each State establish and maintain an advisory panel for the purpose of advising the State special education staff regarding the education of eligible children with disabilities.

This panel, known as the State Advisory Panel for Special Education (SAP), is comprised of parents, persons with disabilities, educators and administrators as well as representatives from public and private agencies.

The SAP advises the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) Division for Special Education Services and Supports on the unmet needs related to the education of children with disabilities within the State and provides feedback on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding special education. The SAP is a critical partner in the development of Georgia's State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). The Panel also advises the Division on the improvement activities that need to be developed and implemented in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each year, members review data on the improvement activities included in the SPP and APR and make suggestions for updates to the activities and targets.

SAP Membership:

This year, the SAP membership consisted of a total of 58 percent of the members being parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The membership included 22 parents of students with disabilities, three individuals with a disability, representatives from the state protection and advocacy agency, the parent training and information center, PART-C, local school administrators, and representatives from Title I, higher education and private schools. In addition, relevant state agencies, including individuals from the Departments of Education, Juvenile Justice, Labor (Vocational Rehabilitation), Corrections, and Family and Children Services, were represented. The Georgia Council for Administrators of Special Education (GCASE) and the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) were also represented. A diversity of

knowledge, background and opinions were brought forth in the work of SAP members through their own personal and/or professional experiences.

SAP Overview:

The SAP met four times during this year in Young Harris, Atlanta, St. Simons Island, and Athens, Georgia. During the year, presentations were made to the panel by members of the GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies, and organizations.

Topics included:

- An orientation to the State Advisory Panel for Special Education
- The legal framework for the State Advisory Panel
- Information related to the rollout of the Common Core Standards
- An update on Statewide Assessments, including information on the new assessments in development that will be aligned with the Common Core
- Updates from the GaDOE, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports
- An overview of the organization and navigation of the GaDOE website
- Proposed changes to the statewide district determination process
- Shifting trends in Special Education
- Updates on the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report
- The Accessible Materials Project
- An overview of the state schools as well as a tour of the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf
- Guidance documents for Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Physical Therapists (PTs)
- The Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support (GNETS) Strategic Plan
- The GaDOE Integrated Monitoring Process
- An update on the Teacher Induction Program
- An overview of the state Vocational Rehabilitation program, including the umbrella of services available for students with disabilities transitioning to the work environment

- A review of the Department of Education’s Question and Answer document regarding service animals
- A presentation on Georgia’s Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement (ASPIRE) project
- Information on Georgia’s ESEA Flexibility Waiver and the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)
- A question and answer session at the University of Georgia’s Disability Resource Center and participation in a tour of the disability resource center

Public Comment:

Public comments were heard at each of the four meetings, allowing panel members the opportunity to hear from constituents around the state. During the 2011-2012 year, public comments made were related to:

- The homeschool system in Georgia
- Students with profound disabilities and their instruction on the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)
- General education teachers meeting the needs of the students with disabilities in the general education classroom
- The opportunity to access and make public comment at SAP meetings
- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) as behavior management strategies
- Concerns about transition of students with severe disabilities out of school and the ability to access services after school
- Discipline of students with disabilities
- Graduation rate for students with disabilities
- The “Read Across Georgia” Initiative

Committees:

Five standing committees met regularly, in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. A brief description of each committee follows as well as a summary of the information discussed by each committee for this year:

- **Dispute Resolution** – The Dispute Resolution Committee reviews data and decisions related to due process proceedings and other forms of dispute resolution. Upon review of data at each quarterly meeting, committee members make recommendations as well as requests for follow-up to the Division related to their findings.
 - The committee reviewed the trend data from 2007-2011 and noted that the number of complaints filed had increased. Mediations were high in 2007 and slowly trended downward until 2011, when the number increased.
 - The committee reported FY 11 data. Eighty-seven complaints were filed with the trend of increased complaints continuing. Thirty-two complaints were withdrawn or dismissed and 55 were investigated. It was determined that 25 districts were not in compliance.

- **Family Engagement** – The Family Engagement Committee assists in the review of fact sheets for families on initial evaluations and annual re-evaluations, transition from Babies Can't Wait into school, transition out of high school, IEPs, and discipline. The committee also reviews data and information related to parent participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and parent response rates on the parent survey. The parent survey is disseminated each year and assesses the percentage of Special Education parents who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. This committee makes recommendations for strategies and materials to support increased family engagement.
 - The committee continues to look at the districts that participate in the parent surveys and would like to look at ways to gather information on parent participation in IEP meetings.

- The committee worked to construct a Top 25 acronym list that includes the definitions of the listed acronyms.
- The committee provided ideas about ways the list could be disseminated.
- It also stated that positive parent involvement might be achieved by having case managers explain/review the process for special education prior to a parent's initial IEP meeting.
- **Membership** – The Membership Committee assists in the recruitment of new members each year. Committee members review all applications received from potential new members and make recommendations to the Division and the State Board of Education for new appointments.
 - The panel received 29 applications for membership.
 - Six panel members renewed for a second term.
- **Public Comment** - The Public Comment Committee receives and tracks all public comments submitted to the SAP for review, including those received in writing, via conference call and in person. Committee members make recommendations for any necessary follow-up and/or response following receipt of each comment.
 - The committee suggested that the panel try to recruit more individuals with disabilities to serve on the SAP.
 - The panel should continue to review data as it relates to discipline for students with disabilities.
 - The committee discussed and made suggestions on ways to increase public comment. One suggestion was to have each member of the panel solicit one person to make public comment.
- **Operating Procedures** - The Policies and Procedures Committee reviews and makes recommendations related to the policies, procedures and by-laws that guide the operations of the SAP.
 - The Policies and Procedures committee worked diligently to reorganize and revamp the procedures for the SAP. The committee recommended changing the title of the committee from “Policies and Procedures” to “Operating Procedures”.

- The committee also made changes to the Companion Attendance section of the procedures. This section will be changed to Advocate/Assistant Attendance. The role of the Advocate/Assistant was more clearly defined.
- The public comment section of the procedures was updated to include the opportunity to make public comment via a phone conference.

Panel Recommendations:

- Gather information on parent participation in IEP meetings.
- Continue to work collaboratively with Parent to Parent to make parents of students with disabilities aware of the variety of resources available. Encourage districts to share the educational fact sheets that have been developed on assistive technology, discipline, due process, formal complaints, extended school year and functional behavioral assessments.
- Continue to actively participate in the national dispute resolution cadre to develop alternatives to the current dispute resolution processes.
- Encourage all special education staff to be active participants in the rollout of the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.
- Efforts should continue to review discipline of students with disabilities. Initiatives through Positive Behavior Interventions and Support should continue to be offered to districts.