



Georgia
State Advisory Panel
for
Special Education

Annual Report

2013-2014

Steve Derr, Chair

Brian Mosley, 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) Divisions 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 Divisions 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.

During the 2013-2014 school year, SAP members focused their efforts on the active engagement and self-determination for students with disabilities, transition opportunities, parent and family engagement, and the utility of assistive technology. We also recognize and appreciate the ongoing efforts of Debbie Gay, Linda Crawford, and other GaDOE staff for their support to the Panel throughout the year and for their collaboration with local systems, agencies, and families to promote student achievement.

SAP Membership:

This year, the SAP membership was comprised of a total of 51% parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The membership included 15 parents

of students with disabilities, two individuals with a disability, representatives from the state protection and advocacy agency, the parent training and information center, PART-C, local school administrators, representatives from Title I, and higher education and private schools. In addition, relevant state agencies, including individuals from the Departments of Education, Juvenile Justice, Labor (Vocational Rehabilitation), Corrections, 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. Members represented a wide array of knowledge, background and opinions. Also, members contributed own real-world personal and/or professional experiences to their work on the SAP.

SAP Overview:

The SAP met four times during this year at a central location in Macon, Georgia. For the 2013-14 year, presentations were made to the committee by members of the GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies, and organizations.

Topics included:

- An overview of the Career Pathways program
- A presentation on Transitional Planning in Georgia
- An update on the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)
- Updates from the GaDOE, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports
- A presentation and update on the State Performance Plan and Annual Progress Report
- An overview of the Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement (ASPIRE) project for student-led IEPs.
- A presentation on the ENCORE! Program from Parent to Parent
- A presentation on the Statewide Family Engagement Initiative: Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership program
- An overview of the Parent Engagement Program
- An update on family engagement efforts of the Georgia PTA
- A review of data for Students With Disabilities (SWD)

- A presentation on the Circles of Adults Focused on Education (CAFÉ) program and its results in the Haralson County School System
- A presentation on the wide array of uses for Assistive Technology and its links to Universal Design for Learning
- A presentation and demonstration on the application of the Tools for Life program
- An update on the changes in Georgia Assessment

Public Comment:

Public comment was heard at one of the four meetings, allowing panel members the opportunity to hear from constituents around the state. During the 2013-2014 year, public comment related to:

- Concerns over post secondary opportunities and experiences for students with disabilities

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 and reported FY 13 data. Trend data for complaints, mediations, and hearings were shared with the panel.
 - The committee reviewed results from due process hearings conducted in Cobb County (1) and Gwinnett County (3).
- **Family Engagement** – The Family Engagement Committee assists in the review of fact sheets for families on initial and annual 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 in order to assess the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services 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 discussed the importance of self-determination as students' transition into adulthood.
 - The committee also recognized the utility of accessing Parent to Parent (P2P) for optimizing family engagement.
 - The committee reported on the success of the Family Engagement Conference held in January of 2014.
- **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 committee thanked panel members for their help in increasing the number of applications received, as well as the diversity those applications embodied with regard to:
 - i. The types of disabilities represented by the applicants;
 - ii. The widespread representation of districts across the state by the applicants.
 - iii. Eight new panel members were recommended to serve on the 2014-2015 panel.
- **Public Comment** - The Public Comment Committee receives and tracks all public comments submitted to the SAP for review, including those received in

writing and in person. Committee members make recommendations for any necessary follow-up and/or response following receipt of each comment.

- The committee continued to focus on a variety of ways to increase the number of public comments made to the SAP. These included contacting professional groups to get the word out regarding public comment, utilizing social media, and providing a coordinated announcement guidance document for members to share to assist people in understanding/utilizing the process.
 - In an effort to solicit more public comment, the decision was made to move public comment on the agenda to the end of day at 7:00 p.m. This was done with the goal of increasing the ability of parents and individuals to participate.
- **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 committee continued to review the procedures for any changes that might need to be made.
 - The committee discussed the issue of how to get more individuals with disabilities involved in the panel.

Panel Recommendations:

- The decision was made to schedule and hold two of the State Advisory Panel meetings in one central location (Macon) for the convenience of constituents across the state to attend and/or make public comment in person. The remaining two panel meetings for the 2014-15 year will be held at other sites so that programs/services offered for students in that specific area can be observed. The meeting format utilized in 2013-2014 will be continued for 2014-2015, with the panel meeting reconvening after dinner on the first day so that public comment can be held in the evening.

- Continue to identify methods to increase public comment at the SAP meetings. The panel's efforts to increase the number of public comments made to the SAP will include, but not be limited to providing a coordinated announcement guidance document for members to share to assist people in understanding/utilizing the process. Also increased efforts will be devoted to using social media, as well as soliciting other organizations (such as Parent 2 Parent, different disability organizations, state agencies, and parent teacher organizations) to possibly build increased understanding of the ability and process to make public comment to the SAP.
- Ensuring that students with disabilities have the knowledge and opportunity to fully utilize the College and Career Pathways program and to develop substantial Transition Planning to be successful in the post-secondary environment they select.
- Encourage more robust family and parent engagement/involvement for students with disabilities to continue to build the capacity for positive student outcomes. The CAFÉ program is one strategy that can help accomplish this goal.
- Emphasize the use of assistive technology for students with disabilities to support their academic success.