



Georgia
State Advisory Panel
for
Special Education

Annual Report

2015-2016

Kyle Berry, Chair

Pam Hunter Dempsey, Vice-Chair

GADOE STATE ADVISORY PANEL (SAP) 2015-16 ANNUAL REPORT

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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 2015-2016 school year, SAP members focused their efforts on post-secondary options for students with disabilities, GNETS, family engagement and GADOE Indicators. The SAP also recognize and continually 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 51% of parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The membership included 15 parents of students with disabilities and four individuals with a disability. The remaining percentage of the SAP included; 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, and a representative from the Georgia PTA 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; twice, at a central location in Macon, Georgia, once in Athens, Georgia, and once in Savannah, GA, for the 2015- 16 year as advised by prior Panel. Presentations were made to the committee by members of the GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies, and organizations. Topics and site visits included:

- A review of Indicator 8 (Parent Satisfaction Survey)
- Legislative updates from the GaDOE
- A presentation on the IEP Facilitation Project

- A presentation on Parent 2 Parent resources, surveys and available trainings
- A review of state and local determinations for FY15 and how the determination is made
- A site visit to Coastal Georgia Comprehensive Academy which included a presentation by a student who participates in the ASPIRE program and an overview of the programs at Coastal Georgia Comprehensive Academy
- A site visit to the University of Georgia which included a presentation on the services offered by UGA's Disability Resource Center and input from a panel of students with disabilities
- Presentation from the Commissioner of TSG -Technical Colleges and Universities about the work that the technical colleges are doing to try to create more opportunities for young people to be able to enter into the program
- A review of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
- Input from a student forum comprised of current students at the Georgia Academy for the Blind
- Presentation on Employment First
- Presentation on the Department of Rehabilitation Services and the requirements of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity
- A presentation from Superintendent Richard Woods on his vision of educating Georgia's students

Public Comment—Public comments were heard at the April and February 2016 meetings, allowing panel members the opportunity to hear from constituents around the state. During the 2015-2016 year, public comment related to:

- Concerns about services available to students with dyslexia
- Concerns about SPED program funding
- Concerns about class sizes
- Concerns about the monitoring of school climate for students with disabilities to ensure that bullying isn't occurring

- Effective family engagement policies and practices
- Concerns about the consistency of SPED services offered by schools across the state
- Inclusion
- The role of technological advances in improving student education
- The role of mental health professionals in the creation of IEPs
- Concerns about how well SPED services and supports are being tailored to meet the individual needs of students

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. **Highlights from this committee included:**

- A notable trend of issues with Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)
- The committee reviewed and reported on results of due process hearings in Fulton County (1) and Houston County(1)

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. **Highlights from this committee included:**

- A discussion of how positive school climate factors into student success
- A discussion on how to increase parent involvement by mobilizing existing resources (Parent mentors and Title I facilitators)

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. **Highlights from this committee included:**

- Made recommendations for 4 new members and 2 returning members for FY17
- Suggested exit survey of members rotating off 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. **Highlights from this committee included:**

- Created letter that will assist all members of SAP to be able to blast out email reminder for public comment
- Suggested utilizing social media to advertise 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. **Highlights from this committee included:**

- Set a deadline for membership applications for the upcoming year and made the application available on the website
- Suggested that the committee draft a proposal to change the procedures to add students to the panel.

Panel Recommendations for 2016-17

- Continue to identify methods to increase public comment at the SAP meetings by adding an automatic acknowledgment of receipt to the public comment form and by encouraging districts to attend SAP and provide information. Request for public comment should also be publicized on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Public comment may also be improved by suggesting relevant topics that commenters can address when commenting
- An exit survey should be created for members rotating off of the panel
- The parent satisfaction survey should be made available to all parents
- Parents of younger students need to be educated on their rights
- There should be collaboration among parent mentors and title I to increase family engagement
- SAP operation procedures should be amended to allow students to become members of the SAP; an open letter should be sent to reach students in each region about application to SAP