

GEORGIA  
STATE ADVISORY PANEL  
FOR SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

Annual Report  
September 2017-May 2018

Chair, Kimberleigh Beard  
Vice-chair, Paul West

## **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 (SAP) for Special Education, 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 State Director 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 Overview of 2017-2018**

The SAP met four times this year in Macon, Georgia. During the 2017-2018 school year, presentations were made to the panel by GaDOE staff, as well as, other individuals, agencies, and organizations.

Topics discussed included:

- Georgia's System of Continuous Improvement
- Georgia Alternate Assessment (2.0)
- Post-Secondary Outcome Data
- ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act)
- New Federal Regulations for Reporting Significant Disproportionality
- GaDOE's Dispute Resolution Model
- SSIP (State Systemic Improvement Plan)
- ASPIRE Project Outcomes and Successes
- Annual Performance Report Indicator Data
- Georgia Parent Mentor Project Partnership
- Parent Survey Results (From parents of SWD served in GA public schools)

### Public Comments

The receipt and review of public comments by the SAP is an essential duty of the panel. It provides an opportunity for constituents of the state of Georgia to provide feedback on desired educational improvements and to identify practices that are currently working well for students with disabilities.

## Public Comments

- Five Public comments were reviewed at the August 24-25<sup>th</sup> meeting, which addressed concerns with class size, school choice, family engagement, IEP training with school systems, and the success of the ASPIRE project.
- Two public comments were reviewed during the November 2-3<sup>rd</sup> meeting which addressed student support and communication within a local school system and school system accountability back to its community.
- Two public comments were reviewed during the January 11-12<sup>th</sup> meeting and primarily addressed the need for more school counselors, bullying of students with disabilities, and the early identification/intervention for students with dyslexia
- Fourteen public comments were reviewed at the May 3-4<sup>th</sup> meeting.

## Committees

Four standing committees met regularly in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. Each subcommittee elected a chairperson who in turn provided feedback and worked directly with the SAP Executive Committee. A brief description of each committee follows:

***SAP Best Practices-*** This committee reviews and discussed current topics and trends from other state advisory panels to make the Georgia SAP meeting process more engaging and productive. Agenda setting, panel feedback expectations, and how interpretation of state data and state indicators are reported and how this data is used are among topics discussed. 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.

***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.

***Inter-Agency Collaboration***—The Inter-Agency Committee consists of panel membership from each of the assigned standing committees. Topics discussed range from how to achieve better panel meeting attendance to sharing out projects that each agency is working toward and how this applies to the work of the SAP. This committee also makes recommendations to the Division and the State Board of Education for new or continuing agency participation. There are currently 14 agencies represented on the SAP.

***Flexibility and Accountability***—The Flexibility and Accountability Committee reviews the information and data presented from each SAP panel meeting and makes recommendations back to the Panel and State Department of Education as to how to report and share this information with the public.

## **Summary of Committee Activities**

As reflected in the May meeting minutes, the SAP recognizes a great need to revisit the utility of its standing committees. This effort was spearheaded by a desire to ensure that the work of the committees remains relevant to the needs of students and current priorities identified by panel members in conjunction with the State Director of the Special Education Division for the Georgia Department of Education.

### ***SAP Best Practices***

- Addressed gaps in membership and brainstormed strategies to strengthen stakeholder engagement
- Discussed Panel Membership Attendance at SAP meetings and future reorganization of meeting time to include general session meetings along with opportunities for small groups to attend break-out sessions.

### ***Inter-Agency Collaboration***

- The committee discussed the role each Agency served on the SAP committee and ways to ensure better two-way communication between Agency initiatives and SAP priorities.
- The committee recommended to “report out” to the SAP Panel on projects each agency is current working on and how its work relates back to the SAP.

### ***Family Engagement***

- Discussed the revised parent survey results and how schools can utilize these results.
- Potential embedding the work of this subcommittee as a common theme in each of the other sub-committees.

### ***Flexibility and Accountability***

- Identify school systems who are considered as leaders in their field to share “best-practices” to the State Department of Education.
- Identify ways in which school systems can better partner with local agencies, pediatricians to improve early Child Find obligations and improve outcomes for young children.

- **SAP Membership**

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

### **Panel Recommendations and Feedback**

This year, the SAP requested that each presenter prepare a set of questions for the panel to answer after their presentations to better facilitate the recommendation process. Throughout the year, the panel's recommendations were centered on family engagement, accessibility of resources and revisions to be made to the panel's by-laws. The panel's recommendations were as follows:

- Recommended and accepted revision to SAP Operating Procedures.
- Recommended a further revision to SAP Subcommittee reorganization for 2018-2019.
- Recommended to accept an increase in SAP membership to 40 members maintaining the 51% membership rate of families/persons with disabilities.
- Recommended that the public comment form be made available in both English and Spanish on the GaDOE website
- Recommended a continuation of efforts to identify methods to increase public comment at the SAP meetings.

## **SAP Feedback for Board Rules/Plans**

The SAP also provided feedback to the GaDOE on the following topics:

- The SAP provided feedback for the new Federal Significant Disproportionality Rule
- The SAP provided feedback for Georgia's proposed Alternative Assessment
- The SAP provided preliminary feedback for each of the state Georgia Annual Performance Indicators.