Georgia State Advisory Panel for Special Education

Annual Report
2019-2020

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Introduction

The Individual 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 the 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 the APR and make suggestions for updates to the appropriate activities and targets.

SAP Membership

The SAP maintained the regulatory requirement of a minimum 51% of the members being parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The membership included 37 parents of students with disabilities, two individuals with disabilities, representatives from state and protection advocacy agencies.

16 appointed agency representatives. 2019-2020 Agency Representatives included:

Georgia Department of Education, Charter Schools
Georgia Department of Education, Special Education
Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
Georgia Department of Corrections
Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice
Georgia Department of Family and Children Services
Georgia Babies Can’t Wait
Institute of Higher Education, Special Education
Georgia Advocacy Office
Georgia Network for Education and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS)
Georgia Superintendents’ Association (GSSA)
Georgia Parent and Teacher Association (PTA)
Members represented a diversity of knowledge, background and opinions and brought their own real life personal and professional experiences to their work on the SAP.

SAP Overview

The SAP met four times this year. The August, November and January meetings were held in Macon, Georgia. The April 2020 meeting was held virtually. During the year, presentations were made to the committee by members of the GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies and organizations.

Topics included:

- Georgia’s System of Continuous Improvement
- Senate Bill 48 (Georgia’s Dyslexia Bill)
- Georgia’s Teacher Shortage (Council for Exceptional Children)
- Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Agency (GVRA)
- State Identified Alternate Diploma Check-in
- Family Engagement and Dispute Resolution data and trends
- Compliance Indicators
- Georgia State Systemic Improvement Plan
- Special Ed Services for students in Foster Care -Georgia Department of Family and Children Services
- Georgia Department of Corrections – Special Ed Services for incarcerated youth
- CARES Act, ED Report to Congress Recommended Waiver Authority
Public Comments

For 2019-2020 the panel received a total of 74 public comments. Public Comments were heard at each meeting held at the August, November and January meetings by SAP allowing members the opportunity to hear from constituents from around the state.

Public comments received were related to:

- Need for better understanding of Senate Bill 48 (Georgia’s Dyslexia Bill)
- Need more money, personnel and training related to Dyslexia
- Need for more qualified teachers for special education
- Need for defined education guidelines for SWD’s related to pandemic

Sampling of specific Comments:

- Constitute (Forsyth County) *Provided public comment via phone conference. The state needs to alter the policies to address the needs of students and parents not the school districts. Schools are using inappropriate compulsory attendance report to require students to return to school even without access to FAPE. There is a trend of denial of FAPE cases.

- Constitute (Forsyth County) *Provided public comment via written statement. Georgia does not have robust laws around Dyslexia and teacher training like other states. The RTI process must include early intervention. School is like running a race. If you fall behind, it will be harder to catch up and more at risk of dropping out.

- Constitute (Cobb County) *Provided public comment via written statement. Progress monitoring (dyslexia) is a critical component of this work and should be appropriately addressed in the handbook. We must consider objective data, subjective data, norm referenced, criterion-referenced data. The special education rule requires the progress monitoring data to presented at the same intervals for the report card-at a minimum.

- Constitute (Fayette County) *Provided public comment via written statement. The State is failing the students-especially students with dyslexia.
Constitute (Paulding County) *Provided public comment via written statement.
Sped services are inadequate and poorly implemented.
Services for SWD can be improved by focusing on methods.
We need more training on laws and implementation.
Leadership must provide guidance.
Local schools should comply with this guidance.

Committees

Five standing committees met regularly in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. Committees included:

- Dispute Resolution
- Family Engagement
- Membership
- Public Comment
- Operating Procedures

Seven standing sub-committees met as needed in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel and committees. Sub-committees are:

- Best Practices
- Family Engagement
- Inter-Agency Collaboration
- Flexibility and Accountability
- Dispute Resolution
- Public Comment
- Marketing

Panel Recommendations

Having used a consensus decision-making model, the State Advisory Panel makes the following recommendations:

- GaDOE to provide infrastructure and supports for leaders, teachers and families to meet the whole needs of each student.
- GaDOE to created, improve and or maintain policy and procedures to support productive school climate that can result in increased quality of life and workforce ready future for students with disabilities.
- GaDOE to develop and implement best practices for FAPE in COVID/pandemic climate.