

Georgia Department of Special Education **State Advisory Panel (SAP)**

FY21 Annual Performance Report

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The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state establish and maintain a Special Education State Advisory Panel (SAP) to advise the State Director for Special Education regarding the unmet needs of the state. Parents, persons with disabilities, educators, administrators as well as representatives from public and private agencies comprise SAP.

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 GaDOE 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 State Director on improvement activities that need to be developed and implemented to improve functional outcomes and improved results 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 of 51 percent of the members being parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The membership included thirty-seven parents of students with disabilities, two individuals with disabilities, and representatives from state and protection advocacy agencies. Members represented diverse knowledge, background, and opinions and brought their own real-life personal and professional experiences to the SAP.

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)
Parent to Parent of Georgia (Parent Training and Information Center)
Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education (GCASE)
Georgia Department of Education, Federal Programs
McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program

SAP Overview

It was an extraordinary year for the SAP. Due to the pandemic, the Panel did not hold any in-person meetings, which are typically four during the school year, held in Macon, GA, each

lasting a day-and-a-half. In their place, there were six virtual meetings, in September, October, and November of 2020 and January, March and May of 2021.

The SAP was polled in the first meeting on the topics that needed to be addressed. Based on feedback, several ideas were identified: (1) Evidence-based Practices/Specially Designed Instruction for students; (2) Progress monitoring technical assistance and resources for families and teachers, (3) Teacher Pipeline for Recruitment and Retention of Special Education Teachers, (4) Dyslexia and Literacy, and (5) equity issues and concerns that impact students with disabilities.

Members of the GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies, and organizations made presentations to the Panel

Topics included:

- Assistive Technology and Transition
- Family Engagement and Dispute Resolution data and trends
- Endrew F. case on the effect of the US Supreme Court's decision on IEPs
- Annual Performance Report Compliance Indicators
- Georgia Dyslexia Pilot and Implementation updates
- Georgia's Teacher Pipeline and New Teacher Retention Grant
- Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services Agency (GVRA) updates
- State Identified Alternate Assessment/Graduation updates
- Special Education Services for Incarcerated Youth in Correctional Facilities/Residential Treatment Facilities - Georgia Department of Corrections
- Restart Guidance for IDEA
- Georgia State Systemic Improvement Plan
- Equitable Access to Physical Activity for Children with Disabilities

Aside from the six meetings, there was a special meeting in August 2021 dedicated to issues pertaining to the Restart of schools, instruction and services in the coming year.

SAP Public Comments

The SAP received four public comments, far fewer than the previous year, probably owing to the virtual format.

Primarily, public comments received were related to:

- Need for a forum in which special education teachers can ask questions and get clarification from the state board of education in a real time format.
- Need for gradually integrating 3-4 year old students into classroom settings, and grouping pre-K students by age.
- Need for parents' appeals to be heard at state, not local level.
- Need for better response to and funding for services for students with disabilities (SWDs) during COVID-related closures.
- Need for defined education guidelines for SWD's related to the pandemic.

- Need for increasing funding, decreasing class sizes, and specialized pay scales for teachers working with specialized instruction students in specific areas.

In addition, a public comment by Dr Ernest Bundschuh, Emeritus Professor of Special Education, UGA on application of Physical Education Performance Standards for Students with Disabilities in October resulted in a presentation in May on equitable access to school-based physical activity opportunities, and developing targeted strategies to promote health and wellness in students who are underserved.

SAP Committees

Over the past years, SAP Committees included the following list:

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

Sub-committees that met as needed in conjunction with the meeting of the full panel and committees included the following list:

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

In the 2020-'21 school year, owing to the virtual format, there were no committee or sub-committee meetings.

SAP Recommendations

Feedback from SAP members was sought individually on surveys on each of the Annual Report Performance Compliance Indicators. As a whole, the SAP made the following recommendations.

1. GaDOE should continue its focus on the 2020 vision, which is to provide infrastructure and supports for leaders, teachers, and families to address the needs of the whole child.
2. GaDOE should create, improve, and maintain policies and procedures to support a positive school climate that can result in increased quality of life and workforce ready future for students with disabilities.
3. GaDOE should continue to develop and implement best practices for a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in a COVID/pandemic climate, even as we slowly emerge from it.

4. GaDOE should continue to address the needs of students with dyslexia and other areas of reading difficulty.
5. GaDOE should address equity issues and concerns that impact students with disabilities and their families.
6. GaDOE should continue to provide progress monitoring technical assistance and resources for families and teachers.



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Educating Georgia's Future