



State Advisory Panel For Special Education

Twin Towers East • Suite 1870 Atlanta, GA 30334

Radha Vettrano, Chair
radhavettrano@bellsouth.net

Nancy Woods, Vice-chair
Nancy.woods@polk.k12.ga.us

State Advisory Panel for Special Education

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The State Advisory Panel (SAP) for Special Education, as established in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), provides input and recommendations to the Division for Special Education Services and Supports on the state performance plan, state improvement grants, the Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process, IDEA Regulations and other initiatives designed to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities in Georgia's schools.

SAP members focused their work during the 2009-2010 school year on improving academic achievement for students with disabilities while recognizing the need for continued collaboration across all educational partners to provide the resources, knowledge and expertise to support all students to reach their full potential. We recognize and appreciate the continued efforts of Nancy O'Hara, Kim Hartsell, Debbie Gay and their staff for their support to Panel members throughout the year and for their continued efforts to work with other GaDOE Divisions, local systems, agencies and parents to promote student achievement.

SAP Overview

The SAP met four times during this year, in Savannah, Cordele, Young Harris, and Athens. Public comments were heard at each of these meetings, allowing panel members the opportunity to hear from constituents around the state. During this year, panel members received information and presentations on the Department's progress toward the development of alternate assessments, on corporal punishment data and usage in Georgia's schools, on Georgia's graduation/drop-out prevention project, and on the GNETS system. In addition, panel members had opportunities to provide input and recommendations to the Department about proposed amendments to special education rules and proposed new rule initiations (restraint & seclusion). One panel member provided a presentation on his personal experiences during transition from high school, including what worked and what did not work to support his transition. Panel members provided input to the Department to assist in the development of the State Performance Plan and the Annual Performance Report as well as in setting focused monitoring priorities for FY2011.

Panel Membership

This year, the SAP membership included twenty-one parents of students with disabilities, one individual with a disability, representatives from the state protection and advocacy agency, the parent training and information center, local school administrators, and representatives from Title I, 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 diversity of knowledge, background and opinions and brought their own real life personal and/or professional experiences to their work on the SAP. All members worked throughout this year to support system-level improvements with a goal to promote greater outcomes and improved student achievement for all students with disabilities.

During this year, the panel introduced a system of mentoring for new members. New members were matched with “veteran” panel members for support and to assist them in understanding the work of the panel so that they would feel comfortable contributing and participating during meetings. In addition to a new member orientation that was held prior to the first meeting of the year, meetings for new members were convened on the morning prior to each quarterly meeting to review the agenda and to fully explain the work that the panel would be doing during the meeting. Both of these new programs were well-received and feedback was positive from new members who felt that they were much better prepared to participate in each meeting.

Committees

Five standing committees met regularly, in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. A brief description of each committee follows:

- **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.
- **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.

- **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.
- **Policies and 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.
- **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 Divisions and the State Board of Education for new appointments.

Recommendations

Specific recommendations from the full SAP membership as well as from sub-committee members follow:

1. Proceed with a rule on the use of restraint and monitored seclusion.

The Panel provided input at each meeting into the department's development of a proposed rule regarding the use of restraint and monitored seclusion. Panel members urge the inclusion of data collection and monitoring into the rule.

2. Focus on widespread dissemination of one page fact sheets to parents.

Look at other agencies and programs, including but not limited to websites, special education directors, therapy associations, Parent to Parent of Georgia, DFCS, Babies Can't Wait, the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), and the Department of Community Health, as "distribution channels" for getting these documents into the hands of parents.

3. Continue to facilitate parent engagement by producing additional one page fact sheets in English and additional languages.

Recommended topics for additional fact sheets included the Georgia Alternative Assessment, assistive technology, Section 504, behavior intervention plans, SB10, response to intervention and the student support team process.

4. Develop more strategies and guidance for systems to increase meaningful parent participation in the IEP process.

The subcommittee on parent engagement requested the data on the number of parents who attend IEP meetings by district and reviewed that data in order to recommend strategies to increase participation. Recommendations included

partnering with Family Engagement Specialists to promote increased family engagement. They also recommended that the Panel send a letter to acknowledge systems with high percentages of parent participation in the IEP process and to also collect best practices from “high performers”. Best practices would be compiled and then shared with systems with low percentages of parent participation.

5. In addition to “Teacher of the Year”, the State should recognize a team of co-teachers as “Co-Teaching Team of the Year”.

Frequently at meetings, Panel members discussed the successes and frustrations of including students with disabilities in the general education setting. Issues were discussed about co-teaching and the training and planning time required for co-teaching and the inclusion of students with more severe disabilities. Panel members felt that general education teachers are not prepared for co-teaching in their pre-service programs nor often in in-service or professional development training. Co-teaching is implemented without training or co-planning time in many instances. Panel members also discussed situations where it is very successful and suggested honoring a team of great co-teachers annually.

6. Continue the implementation of the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) that focuses on reducing drop out and improving graduation rate for students with disabilities.

The SPDG should continue to include professional learning, technical support and follow-up coaching to assist school systems in implementing strategies addressed in the dropout prevention and graduation enhancement components of the project. Information, materials and “lessons learned” in the initial years of this grant need to be shared with more schools and systems to promote sustainability that will last after the end of the grant.

The SAP serves as the advisory committee for the SPDG that focuses on reducing dropout rate and improving graduation rate. The panel was updated at each meeting on the activities of the SPDG and the Panel provided input into the activities. The SPDG also has activities that focus on very early intervention to reduce dropout by working with families and young children to increase literacy. Data for students with disabilities on dropout rate and graduation rate are improving steadily.

7. Continue with plans for implementation of the “2% test” for grades 3-8 in the 2010/2011 school year. Provide professional learning and technical support, including the use of a “style guide” for teachers to assist them in providing appropriate instruction to students with disabilities to prepare them for the 2% assessment.

The SAP served as the advisory committee for the enhanced assessment grant the GaDOE testing division received. The grant reviewed the data on poor performers

over time and assisted the department in defining appropriate populations for the 2% assessment. After reviewing the information learned by the grant, the Panel continues to recommend the need for a 2% assessment for students with disabilities in order to assess students appropriately.

8. Support the implementation of school-wide Positive Behavior Support to support a positive school climate and reduce the use of punitive discipline, assignment to alternative schools, etc., as punitive methods have little effect on improving behavior of students or teaching them the correct behavior.

The Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports have provided professional learning and technical assistance to local schools in the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). Additional schools and districts continue to implement PBIS with support from GaDOE staff. Data consistently indicates a significant decrease in office discipline referrals and increase in instructional time in each of the schools.