

APPENDIX H

Student Discussion Group Summaries

Student Focus Group Discussions
OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process
Aggregated Results

Dates: **October 12, 13, 23, 24**
 November 10
Schools: **Hodgson Vo-Tech, William Penn, Laurel, Lake Forest, McKean**
Students: **45**

What in your school experience has been most helpful?

What special education supports and services have been most helpful?

- Supportive, individualized attention from teachers has been very helpful to me.
- A person that knows you and cares about you.
- Teachers dealing with me on a personal level.
- Teachers don't hesitate to help.
- Teacher aides help, also.
- Schools have given accommodations with things I have needed.
- I am given extra time to do some of my tests.
- TAM classes help a lot.
- Small classes help a lot.
- VR counselor who will help me find a job when I am out of school.
- Practical work. (hands-on, career exploration, co-op, other life skills)
- After-school tutoring programs helpful in getting work done and keeping up.
- I feel safe in school.
- Small classes help a lot.

In what types of classroom settings have you received most of your special education services?

- Mostly, I have had a combination of regular and special ed. classes
- The separate special ed. classes are alright. They help us.
- TAM and separate special education classes.

In your experience, what are some things about special education supports and services you do not like?

- Some students tease and make fun of my being in special education.
- Some teachers don't care or bother to help (reference to regular ed. teachers)
- Not enough materials.
- Work is too childish.
- Many teachers don't understand our special education needs.
- Not enough hands-on activities.
- Some of the courses don't meet my needs.
- On the state test, I don't do well, because we are never taught the stuff we need to pass it.
- Being in the special education classroom is embarrassing.
- I don't care what others think. I am here to get some help.
- I don't think we are prepared for life after school, because they don't give the level of work we need to make it.

What changes would you make to special education services and your education if you could?

- Classifications should be cleared up, so we don't have to have one just to get the help we need.
- People need to understand we are not dumb. With ADD or LD, it takes twice the energy for us to be successful than some others.

- Any teacher should be able to help us with our work, not just the special education teacher.
- High schools could do more to help you prepare for the future.
- I want more career classes and tech classes. I want the things they do at Sussex Tech. (others commented about other Tech High Schools)
- I would like more TAM classes.
- Too many classes in a day. People get overwhelmed and drop out.
- More involvement in my learning, more hands-on, practical work.
- Teachers should be educated to provide supports in regular education.
- Discipline needs to be better.
- We need more good teachers.
- We need more technology. We are in a poor district, and we need more updated materials.

Have you participated in your IEP meetings during middle and high school? If yes, what has that experience been like? If no, why didn't you attend?

- I like the information at the IEP meeting. It tells me what I have to work on.
- It is mostly positive stuff.
- I get to speak up for myself. I got a class changed because of the IEP meeting.
- I almost ran my last IEP meeting. I didn't think I was ready. It is good to sit and talk with everyone.
- They will help me get through to graduation.
- They didn't want me to come in middle school. I was told it was an adult meeting, and it felt awesome when they told me I had to come in high school. I felt like I had a voice.
- I don't say much. I just sign the paper.
- We discussed what accommodations we have and how we did on the state tests, and what options we have.
- It was good. We went over some strong points and some weaknesses. It was helpful.
- No, I didn't feel like going.

What one piece of advice do you have, or what one final thing would you like to tell the new governor of Delaware about education?

- From 9th grade on, students should have a person to help you with problems and getting jobs or whatever.
- In all schools, at all grade levels, there needs to be more understanding of individual needs, and compassion, a more caring environment.
- We need to have all the high schools to be able to do what the Vo-Tech does with jobs and careers. They should have some of our luxuries spread to other schools.
- School is not preparing us for the future. Counselors don't help us explore, and don't give us assistance.
- I want more interesting work. It's always the same old stuff in special education.
- I want a campus, where we could go outside and relax. Things are too rushed, and we don't have the choices on what we want to do.
- I want the schools to be safer. There is too much violence in our schools.
- The state should spread out the dollars more. Laurel can't have all the nice things like Sussex Tech gets.
- We need more textbooks and other materials.
- Prepare us better for college. (reference to special education classes at their HS)

SUMMARY

Student Focus Group Discussions OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process October-November, 2000

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has initiated a “Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process” to assess the impact and effectiveness of state and local efforts to provide a free, appropriate public education to child and youth with disabilities. Delaware is undergoing a self-assessment to identify the strengths and areas for improvement regarding the provision of special education services.

One part of the self-assessment has been to conduct group interviews with 45 high school students from five high schools in the state. Two high schools selected students to participate in the discussions, while special education classes in three other schools spoke about issues related to their education. A majority of the students participating were 12th graders, but all grades were represented in the interviews.

What follows are the questions asked the students in each of the meetings and the major themes arising from the discussions.

What school experiences and special education supports and services have been most helpful?

Students stated very clearly that the **special education teachers have been the most important factor** in their success in school. A vast majority of teachers provide supportive, individualized attention for the students. Not only do they support students academically, the teachers get to know students as individuals and demonstrate that they care.

Students in almost all schools were able to identify **accommodations and supports** in special education settings, regular classes and testing situations that have been very helpful. Examples from students included extra time, computers, spell checkers, and after-school programs.

Practical, hands-on learning and career development opportunities were seen as extremely helpful to students. Many stated that this is where they could excel in school and learn about what they wanted to do when leaving the public school system.

In what classroom settings are students receiving special education services?

Although they received, in almost all cases, a combination of separate special education and regular classes, the provision of supports through **TAM classes** was seen as very helpful to most students. Not only did they learn the same curriculum as the general student population, they received help in those settings without being singled out as “special ed.”

Students receiving support in **special education classes** thought that the individualized attention and opportunity for the teacher to get to know the students was a positive factor.

What are some negative aspects of the special education services they have received?

Many **teachers do not understand the special education needs** that students have when they are in regular education classes. Some regular education teachers do not provide the help students need. Students commented often that **courses do not meet their needs** or prepare them academically or

vocationally for the future. Being in **special education is embarrassing for some students**. They state they are teased or thought to be dumb because they are in the special classes. The **curriculum is not seen as challenging** by many students, and some stated that they are not prepared for the state tests because they are never taught the material.

What changes would students make?

Many students felt that **classifications** should be eliminated. They don't see why they are needed just to receive the help to be successful. Others stated that **general education teachers need to better understand disabilities and how to support students**.

Curriculum and courses should be more focused on career development. Programs offered through the Vocational-Technical Schools would be beneficial for all students. It was mentioned numerous times that **more practical, hands-on learning experiences** are important.

Students were also **concerned about the lack of materials**, such as computers and textbooks, and would make sure that enough were available for every student.

Have students attended their IEP meetings? What were their thoughts about the meetings?

Almost all students in the five high schools reported **attending their IEP meetings in high school**. Only a **few attended during the middle school** years. Students were **overwhelmingly positive** about the meetings, stating it was good to learn about their strengths and educational needs. Some mentioned that they felt **they had a voice**, with two students mentioning they had **courses changed while at IEP meetings**. Also mentioned were assistance by the school to get through to graduation and options for classes.

What advice do students have for the new governor of Delaware regarding education?

Very important to most students was the issue of **school funding**. Some stated the need for more computers and other materials, while others felt there was a **disparity in quality of education between "rich and poor" school districts**. Schools should have a **more caring environment** for students, and all students should have a **person to help them through personal problems and prepare them for college and/or careers**.