SOUTH CAROLINA
ACESD
Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

South Carolina
Advisory Council for Educating Students
with Disabilities

Annual Report
for
School Year 2020-21

Staff Support provided by the
South Carolina Department of Education,
Office of Special Education
Rebecca C. Davis, Director

SOUTH CAROLINA
ACESD
Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

Dear Superintendent Molly Spearman and the South Carolina State Board of Education:

On behalf of the South Carolina Advisory Council on the Education of Students with Disabilities (ACESD), I am pleased to submit Annual ACESD's report of activities, accomplishments, and recommendations for school year 2020-2021. As we summarize our work for the year, we would like to acknowledge the unprecedented times we found ourselves navigating due to the global pandemic. We recognize the hard work, long hours, innovative solutions, and acknowledge the difficult decisions and choices that the Department of Education had to make this year. We would like to thank the leadership of Rebecca C. Davis, Director of the Office of Special Education (OSES) and her Team for ensuring that students with disabilities and their families were offered a voice and an advocate as educational decisions were being made this 2020-2021 school year.

The ACESD is comprised of parents of students with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, K–12 general and special educators, school district administrators, advocates, representatives of nonprofit organizations, representatives of higher education, and governmental service providers from throughout the state.

The majority of the work of the Advisory Council is done in five committees: Executive; Transition and Self-Advocacy; Safe Schools; Professional Development; and Preschool. Every Advisory Council member participates in at least one committee.

The full Advisory Council meets four times a year and is open to the public. We encourage anyone with an interest in special education to attend and present their concerns and suggestions for improving opportunities for students with disabilities.

The Advisory Council appreciates the continued support, information, and guidance provided by the South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Special Education as we work together to make a free and appropriate public education a reality for all students in South Carolina.

Respectfully,



Amy A. Holbert, Chair
South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

SOUTH CAROLINA
ACESD
Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

Table of Contents

I. Advisory Council Mandate

II. Vision

III. Mission

IV. Advisory Council Membership

V. Public Participation

VI. Public Comments

VII. Committees

VIII. Communications

IX. Accomplishments and Activities

X. Recommendations

Appendix: (A) Calendar, (B) Agenda, (C) Minutes, (D) Member Listing (E) Summary of Preschool Report

I. Advisory Council Mandate

In accordance with Section 300.167–300.169 of the final regulations of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (IDEA '04) each state is required to establish and maintain an advisory council for the purpose of providing guidance with respect to special education and related services for students with disabilities. The South Carolina Advisory Council on the Education of Students with Disabilities (Advisory Council) works in collaboration with the Office of Special Education Services of the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE).

II. Vision

The Advisory Council envisions a world where all students are respected and challenged, where the needs of all students are met, and where the aspirations for success of all students are fulfilled.

III. Mission

The Advisory Council's mission is to make recommendations that impact decisions made on behalf of students with disabilities to enhance the quality of educational services they receive and to enable them to reach their individual potential.

IV. Advisory Council Membership

The members are selected on the basis of their knowledge of, or experience in, the education of students with disabilities. Members are broadly representative of South Carolina's population in regard to developmental, physical and mental disabilities, race, ethnic background, gender, and geographic location. Representation of the Council is established by statute to include parents of students with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, general and special educator's K–12, school district administrators, advocates, representatives of higher education, and governmental service providers. The majority of members must be parents or individuals with disabilities.

A formal application process is used by the Executive Committee to provide recommendations for appointment by the Superintendent of Education. New members are appointed in July of each year and serve for a three-year period.

V. Public Participation

All Advisory Council meetings and agenda items are announced in advance of each meeting to afford interested parties a reasonable opportunity to attend. A public comment period is provided at each meeting. The Advisory Council takes all testimony under advisement and forwards comments to committees, agencies or departments as appropriate.

VI. Public Comments

Opportunities for public input into the activities of the Advisory Council are important. Individuals, groups, or organizations may address the Advisory Council in the following ways:

- In person: During the Public Comment period outlined in the agenda the person providing public comment may join the virtual platform to issue their public comment
- In writing: Public comment may be submitted electronically or through the US Mail addressed to the Advisory Council liaison at the OSES or the Chairperson of the Advisory Council.

During the 2020-2021 year, the ACESD received public comments on the following topics:

Public comments were presented at two Full Council meetings, with no public comment requests at two meetings.

The comments this year were related to district responses to COVID-19 pandemic:

- One parent expressed concern about a district process of selecting schools for children, where a student in special education and a sibling may be placed at separate schools, creating a burden on the family.
- A parent requested a statewide mandate for an in-person education option during the pandemic based on a perceived lack of access to the general education curriculum in a virtual format.

- Another parent provided an update on a prior public comment about safety concerns for her child at school, and also expressed concern that children with disabilities were not receiving the same access as their general education peers at the beginning of the pandemic.
- During the final meeting of the year, a parent shared her concern that virtual education models may be the only appropriate model for children with health concerns during the pandemic; however, she found the virtual model to not be suitable to students with special education needs. She expressed concern for herself and other parents, that their children were falling behind during COVID.

VII. Committees

The **Executive Committee** directs the business of the Advisory Council to include developing meeting agendas, overseeing the nomination process, setting the calendar, reviewing the by-laws and policies, and developing the annual report. This committee also represents the Advisory Council in a variety of state-level activities.

The **Transition and Self Advocacy Committee** works to research and identify the unmet transition services needs of students with disabilities and to disseminate information about successful transition programs and services.

The **Safe Schools and Mental Health Committee** collaborates with state and local agencies that provide services to students, families, and schools in the area of mental health, bullying prevention, and seclusion/restraints.

The **Professional Development Committee** collaborates with the SCDE and higher education to improve and expand the delivery of information regarding special education issues, legal issues, and best practices to all teachers, administrators and general public.

The **Preschool Committee** works to improve the identification of preschool age children with special needs, improve access to inclusive practices and programs, and ensure the prompt delivery of services.

VIII. Communications of the Council

To encourage the participation of all members in the Advisory Council's activities, and to keep the public informed and involved in identifying the unmet needs of students with disabilities, a variety of means of communicating and disseminating information is used.

- The Advisory Council utilized Teams for virtual meetings due to the pandemic.

- The Advisory Council utilized conference calls and e-mails to conduct business, review information, receive updates from the OSES, and expedite decision-making.
- The Advisory Council prepared the Annual Report for submission to the Superintendent of Education to formally inform the SCDE of the unmet needs of students with disabilities and to make recommendations for addressing those needs.
- The Advisory Council recorded and maintained minutes of each meeting of the Advisory Council and its committees. The minutes are available to the public online and upon request.

IX. Activities and Accomplishments

During the period covered by this report, Advisory Council members participated in the following activities:
General Activities of the Council

- Four virtual meetings were conducted to enable the work of the Council to continue;
- Received information from the OSES concerning the State Performance Plan (SPP), the Annual Performance Report (APR), The State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), report from the SCDE Office of General Counsel, and provided comments;

Executive Committee

- Conducted five executive meetings to set calendar/agendas, made recommendations for membership, reviewed bylaws, and performed oversight of the activities of the Advisory Council.

Safe Schools Committee

In order to address the identified scope, the Safe Schools/Social-Emotional Learning Subcommittee completed the following activities:

- Welcomed new and returning members and OSES Team representatives. Priorities from the previous year were reviewed.
- Discussed alignment of committee work with OSES priorities/initiatives.
- Reviewed concerns with COVID-19 associated with virtual and hybrid learning.
- Identified a team to continue school resource officer training in 2021.
- Discussed a potential resource – Handle with Care Michigan.
- Explored how Social Emotional-Learning overlaps with subcommittee priorities.

Professional Development Committee

In this reporting year, the Professional Development Committee met during three of four Full Council meetings held.

The Professional Development Committee:

- Welcomed new and returning members as well as OSES Academic Team representatives, discussed the background and purpose of the Committee, and recapped last reporting year's activities.

- The Committee continued discussion of alignment of committee work and goals with the OSES Framework and System of Tiered Assistance (SoTA) for authentic engagement and advising.

- The Committee will aim to expand and improve the delivery of information by acting as an umbrella committee for technical assistance in conjunction with other committees (focused on what parents, teachers, and schools need).

- The Committee consulted with our representatives from the OSES Academics Team to learn more about this team, the mission/vision, its work, and opened what will be an ongoing discussion of how the Committee can align and assist with priorities/initiatives as they update the Committee on their ongoing work.

- The Committee discussed some logistics for how we might balance alignment with the OSES Academics Team as well as acting as an umbrella committee for TA in conjunction with other committees during and between our full council meetings. Three PD/OSES Academics Committee members volunteered and were assigned as liaisons for other sub-committees so that we are able to stay abreast of what committee priorities are and how we might assist them.

- Continued discussion occurred surrounding the status of the joint meetings of the Transition & Self-Advocacy and Professional Development Committees from the previous year regarding special education teacher certifications in South Carolina and the survey work that had been developed. It was decided to further divide both Committees into subgroups for volunteer focus on completion of this teacher certification work over the summer and in the coming year so that each committee can continue work on other priority areas simultaneously.

- The Committee has prioritized the following unmet needs for the coming year: diploma pathways, involvement of students and families, and increased exposure for ACESD.

Transition and Self-Advocacy

The Committee welcomed new and returning members and provided background on the Committee for new members. This was a year of transition and adjustment for our Committee from the abrupt end to our activities due to Covid-19 last year, starting back up in a virtual environment, and developing a collaboration with members of OSES's new Post-Secondary Team.

During this year, the Committee discussed OSES's new focus as well as learning more about OSES's Post-Secondary Team. The Committee met with members of the Post-Secondary Team and discussed their focus and work. The Committee shared about the work done thus far looking into special education certifications. We explored how our Committee can align with the Post-Secondary Team. It was decided that the Post-Secondary Outcomes Team will provide a report of its work prior to Committee meetings to help inform our Committee. The Committee offered to provide input when needed to the Post-Secondary Outcomes team.

The Committee also discussed the previous joint meetings of the Transition & Self-Advocacy and Professional Development Committees regarding the concern of special education certifications in South Carolina. We understand that special education certifications in South Carolina are broken up into disability categories. Some states certify in bands. We had questioned whether this impacts students with disabilities and whether a recommendation should be made to OSES in this area. The Committees were in the process of developing surveys in an effort to gather more information in this area. This effort was not further addressed last year due to the cancellation of ACESD meetings due to weather and Covid-19. After further discussion, the Committee decided to continue work in this area. The draft surveys were sent to Committee members for input. The Committee also asked OSES to send a request to the SCDE's Educator Effectiveness & Leadership Development Department to have a representative attend our last Committee meeting to discuss the required credentials for certification of special education teachers as well as the information gathered in late 2019 for the Committee (regarding special education certification in other states and the surveys conducted by NASDTEC on special education certification). This requested was placed on hold due to the decision that Committees would not meet at the final ACESD full council meeting. This Committee and the Professional Development Committee have asked for volunteers to continue the work left off on this project.

Other concerns and areas that were raised and discussed by Committee members during the 2020/2021 year included:

- Concerns regarding the current high school credential and current requirements to receive a high school diploma in South Carolina. Many of the Committee members shared an interest in this area and desire to continue

this conversation. Given this interest, this area will likely be further discussed by the Committee in the future.

- Concerns related to Covid-19:
  - A Committee member shared experiences with a local school district planning for students to return to school as well as impacts to students due to obstacles like quarantine.
  - Vaccinations of students aged 16-22. It was raised that studies have shown that individuals with certain types of disabilities are impacted more by Covid-19. Concerns raised about students not being able to have community experiences with health/safety concerns.
- Sharing information on transition related activities occurring in the community as well as the bill that was introduced on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, to end subminimum wage in South Carolina. This bill was passed via the SC Senate and will carry over to the 2022 session.

Preschool Committee

The Preschool Committee met four times during the year. The Committee discussed many challenges the pandemic had on service provision for young children and their families. In March 2020, COVID-19 changed the context for education and as a result special education services and access to civil rights protected by IDEA and ADA had to modify as well. The preschool committee observed the need to review the following areas to support future planning:

- broadband access; to include technology for parents of young children.
- virtual instruction strategies and limiting virtual exclusionary discipline practices;
- stakeholder (providers and families) feedback on successes and opportunities for improvement in service provision and access;
- early intervention model and formats for virtual or at home learning for young children including: social supports, inclusion, behavior supports;
- review procedures for C to B transition conferences and eligibility determination in the context of virtual instruction and contact restrictions;
- review communication procedures for supporting families during the pandemic including:

1. Loss of contact to families/young students with disabilities;
2. Prior written notice and Individualized Education Program (IEP) services in LRE when general education location changes; and
3. Supporting families of young children who are highly mobile (homeless or migrant families), military, speak English as a second language, are foster families, or have other unique needs.

Accomplishments for 2020:

- In the 2020 Annual Report, the committee recommended a review of Child Find Processes and Procedures due to a decrease in early childhood special education numbers. As a result of these efforts, despite the influence of the pandemic, early childhood special education numbers have increased. As such, continued monitoring of child find data and review of policies and procedures as needed will occur.
- The 2020 Annual Report also recommended increased attention and recommendations to support timely C to B transitions as the number of eligible three-year-olds has consistently increased over the past several years. Through close partnership between Parts C and B 619 and the efforts of the transition committee of the Child Find Task Force for preschool students, South Carolina Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have policies and processes in place to support an increase in eligible three-year-olds. As such, continued monitoring of transition data and strategic supports as needed will occur.

X. Recommendations

When SC schools closed due to COVID-19, State Office of Special Education Direction, Rebecca Davis, convened a 'Stakeholders Committee" to advise on issues related to the pandemic. ACESD's Chair, Jane McMillian, participated and was able to attend weekly meetings during the most crucial months and then monthly meetings as schools began to reopen. Recommendations included:

a) Need for technology
b) Need for broadband internet coverage statewide
c) Clear communication to families and communication in multiple modalities including native language and the use of assistive technology or interpreters.

d) Need to ensure students continued to receive related services during virtual learning.

The 2020-2021 Preschool report was reviewed with our OSES representative Dr. Jenny May and approved by the Preschool Committee. Was submitted by February 1st to the General Assembly. The identified focus areas for the following year include:

- Professional development opportunities;
- Social emotional learning and supports;
- Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS); and
- Response to intervention (RTI).

SOUTH CAROLINA
ACESD
Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

Appendix A

2020 – 2021 Full Council Meeting Calendar
South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

All meetings were held virtually

September 18, 2020
November 20, 2020
February 2, 2021
April 16, 2021

SOUTH CAROLINA
ACESD
Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

Appendix B

The agenda for each ACESD meeting is shared with each member 24 hours prior to the meeting. You may find the agendas by following this link.

Appendix C

The ACESD secretary records minutes during each full council meeting. Those minutes are reviewed at the beginning of the following meeting, in which any corrections may be made as suggested by the body. The ACESD then votes to approve the minutes or hold for further review. The minutes are found here.

Appendix D

Membership listing 2020-2021
Cherolyn Allen
Natalie Austin
Emily Beasley
Susan Beck
Kelly Birmingham
Valarie Bishop
Kathy Bryant
Jennifer Buster
Amanda Campbell
Jay Collins
Mary Lynne Diggs
Kimberly Dunn Addis
Tia Fletcher
Robin Frierson
Hollis Gunn
Amanda Hess
Amy Holbert
Monica Johnson
Kerri Kannengieser
Marianne Koehl
Cathy Kovac
Melissa Latham
Melina Lee
Karma Marshall
Tammy McKenna
Jane McMillan
Margaret Meriwether
Benjamin Miedema
Linda Mirabal-Pace
Michelle Murphy
Janie Neeley
Emily Paul
Kimberly Perry
Janet Robinson
Lilli Rogers-Brown
Sarah Sharpe
Heather Smith Googe
Cara Smithwick
Linda Spears
Nina Spinelli

Kimberly Tissot
Meghan Trowbridge
Monica Tudder
Laura Vazquez
Sherry Lynn Williams
Tanya Wilson

SOUTH CAROLINA
ACESD
Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

Appendix E

The preschool committee of the Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (ACESD) is charged with the responsibility of identifying and studying key issues in special education and early intervention, advising and assisting the Office of Special Education Services of the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE). The 2020 Annual Report and resulting recommendations are pursuant to Act 86 of 1993, Chapter 36 of Title 59 of the Amended Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976.

Complete Preschool Annual Report here.