South Carolina Advisory Council

For Educating Students with Disabilities

Annual Report 2021-22

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 (Advisory Council), I am pleased to submit this report summarizing the Advisory Council's activities and accomplishments from July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.

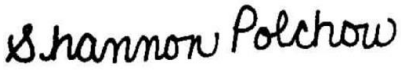
The past year has been another exceptional opportunity for collaboration between the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Office of Special Education Services (OSES) and the Advisory Council. Membership of the Advisory Council includes: parents of students with disabilities, individuals with 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 by five committees: Executive; Transition and Self-Advocacy; Safe Schools / Social-Emotional Learning; 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 support, information, and guidance provided by the SCDE, OSES as we strive together to make a free and appropriate public education a reality for all students in South Carolina. A special note of thanks goes to Rebecca C. Davis, Former Director of the OSES, Jill Christmus, Interim Director of the OSES, Lannette Cox, OSES Advisory Council Liaison, Gwen Gladden, OSES Administrative Assistant, and Shanta Jackson, OSES Administrative Assistant for their continuous commitment to the operation of the Advisory Council.

Sincerely,



Dr. Shannon Polchow, Chair
South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

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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 2021-2022 year, the Council did not receive any public comment.

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 / Social-Emotional Learning 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 worked to update the web page at the SCDE, OSES's website, to increase the presence of the Council.
- 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 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

- Conducted four virtual meetings to carry out the work of the Council.
- 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 regarding the legislative session 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

The Safe Schools Committee welcomed new and returning members, discussed the background and purpose of the Committee, and recapped last reporting year's activities.

The Committee consulted with our representatives from the OSES Social Emotional Learning Team and continued the ongoing discussion of how the Committee can align and assist with priorities/initiatives as they update the Committee on their ongoing work.

The Committee had three primary foci this term which included a suspension / expulsion data analysis and review, learning about the Handle with Care Program in South Carolina, also known as the

During the term, the Committee discussed the consistency needed for foster parents to identify special education status when foster children transfer schools was held. The committee concluded that a collaboration between OSES and DSS is needed in order to develop better consistency of this protocol of sharing special education status, potentially through training for foster parents or some forms or checklists for school transfers.

Professional Development Committee

The Professional Development Committee welcomed new and returning members, discussed the background and purpose of the Committee, and recapped last reporting year's activities. This year was one of change for the Committee as co-chair Dr. Michelle Murphy resigned from the position midyear.

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 and continued the ongoing discussion of how the Committee can align and assist with priorities/initiatives as they update the Committee on their ongoing work.

Working in conjunction with the Transition and Self-Advocacy Committee, the Professional Development Committee focused on two main issues: drafting a letter of encouragement for OSES regarding the state of special education certification in South Carolina; and examining diploma pathways, including the obstacles that prevent students from being on the diploma track, particularly in earlier grades. The Committee also continues to contemplate ways to increase exposure of ACESD.

Transition and Self-Advocacy Committee

The Transition and Self-Advocacy Committee welcomed new and returning members and provided background on the Committee for new members. Throughout the year, the Committee continued to work with members of OSES's Post-Secondary Outcomes Team. The information the team provided helped to inform the work of the Committee.

The Committee worked jointly this year with the Professional Development Committee on two main issues. First, the Committee continued the work begun last year on special education certification in South Carolina. We understand that special education certifications in the state 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. While the Committee initially undertook writing a position paper to present to the SCDE, after speaking with Rebecca Davis and Julie Fowler, the Committee decided to draft a letter of encouragement, which should be presented to OSES next term.

Second, the Committee began discussing concerns about South Carolina's pathway to a high school diploma as well as the credential. Specifically, members expressed concern with the lack of understanding at the pre-high school levels of how educational decisions can impact a student's ability to be on the diploma track in ninth grade. In education, we tend to work in silos. Decisions made in elementary school, and even before, can impact a student's high school path. The Committee would like to explore ways in which we can provide more information to principals, teachers, and parents about how to have better transitions between the educational levels.

Preschool Committee

The Preschool Committee welcomed new and returning members, discussed the background and purpose of the Committee, and recapped last reporting year's activities. This year was one of change for the Committee as co-chair Amy Holbert resigned from the position midyear. Heather Smith Googe finished out the term as co-chair.

Attention this year focused on the continuing residual effects of the pandemic. The crisis created by the pandemic is still very real in relationship to ensuring that there are enough adults in schools to maintain a healthy and safe environment for learning. The Committee discussed efforts to support districts to educate the community about the resources are available. How does OSES know what districts are doing related to Child Find? Cohorts have been set up to check with districts related to the outcomes. Reviewing their outreach processes to work

more in the community outside of the district. The Committee discussed ways to make better connections with pediatricians regarding child find and an understanding of the educational criteria for eligibility vs. medical criteria. It was suggested that OSES could make contact with the QTIP (Quality Through Technology and Innovation in Pediatrics) to start building a connection with Pediatricians throughout the state. Finally, the Committee worked with members of the Senate Finance Committee to ensure that funding for special education preschool remained untouched in the new proposed funding model.

The 2020-2021 Preschool report was reviewed with our OSES representative Lisa Kershaw. The identified focus areas for the following year include: preschool educators and their mental health; salary parity for people providing preschool special education services; providing support to districts to increase Child Find due to a decrease in the number of children receiving preschool special education services during the 2020-2021 school year; increasing the continuum of placements for preschool children with IEPs in order to meet LRE.

Accomplishments for 2021-2022:

- The Council adopted a revised set of bylaws.
- Because of recommendations made by the Preschool Committee, OSES began making connections with pediatricians in a beginning effort to educate that community about child find and the difference between educational criteria vs. medical criteria.
- The Council met with members of the Senate Finance Committee to advocate for funding for preschool special education students within the new funding model.

X. Recommendations

First, the Council recommends that we re-examine the make-up of the Preschool Committee. According to former OSES Director Rebecca Davis, South Carolina's Advisory Council is one of the largest in the U.S., and this is due to South Carolina law. The Council agrees that it is time to pursue changing some of the state requirements for the Preschool Committee seeing that many of its required members are required to serve on many other state-level committees.

While a letter of encouragement is forthcoming, the Council recommends that the Department re-examine the way that South Carolina certifies educators in special education. We understand that special education certifications in the state are broken up into disability categories. Some states certify in bands. With

the current teacher shortage, the Council wonders if the state's current system of certifying special-education teacher could be improved.

Finally, the Council notes the consistency needed for foster parents to identify special education status when foster children transfer schools was held. The Council recommends that a collaboration between OSES and DSS is needed in order to develop better consistency of this protocol of sharing special education status, potentially through training for foster parents or some forms or checklists for school transfers.

Appendix A

2021 – 2022 Full Council Meeting Calendar
South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

All meetings were held virtually

August 27, 2021
October 22, 2021
January 28, 2022
March 25, 2022

Appendix B

The agenda for each ACESD meeting is shared with each member at least 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 2021-2022

Cherolyn Allen
Emily Beasley
Susan Beck
Andrea Bejarano-Robinson
Kelly Birmingham
Valarie Bishop
Kathy Bryant
Jennifer Buster
Amanda Campbell
Jay Collins
Mary Lynne Diggs
Kimberly Dunn Addis
Robin Frierson
Hollis Gunn
Amanda Hess
Amy Holbert
Monica Johnson
Kerri Kannengieser
Haley Keisler
Marianne Koehl
Cathy Kovacs
Melissa Latham
Karma Marshall
Tammy McKenna
Benjamin Miedema
Linda Mirabal-Pace/Birley Wright
Michelle Murphy
Janie Neele
Emily Paul
Kimberly Perry
Shannon Polchow
Lilli Rogers-Brown
Sarah Sharpe
Heather Smith Googe
Cara Smithwick
Laura Spears
Nina Spinelli
Meghan Trowbridge
Monica Tudder
Laura Vazquez
Danielle Verwers
Tanya Wilson
Paige Winget

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 2021 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.

See full preschool report here