



**South Carolina Advisory Council  
For Educating Students with Disabilities**

**Annual Report 2022-23**

Dear Superintendent Ellen Weaver and the South Carolina State Board of Education,

On behalf of the South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (Advisory Council), I am pleased to submit this report summarizing the Advisory Council's activities and accomplishments from July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

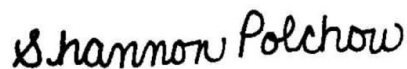
The past year has been another exceptional opportunity for collaboration between the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), Office of Special Education Services (OSES) and the Advisory Council. Membership of the Advisory Council includes parents of students with disabilities, individuals with 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, Preschool, Professional Development, Safe Schools and Mental Health, and Transition and Self-Advocacy. 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 the following people for their continuous commitment to the operation of the Advisory Council: Peter Keup, Director of the OSES, Dr. Jill Christmus, former Interim Director of the OSES, Dr. Julie Fowler, Cheryl Fitts, OSES Advisory Council Liaison, B'Evelyn Jackson, former OSES Advisory Council Liaison, Dr. Lannette Cox, former OSES Advisory Council Liaison, and Doris Johnson, former OSES Administrative Assistant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon Polchow". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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

Table of Contents

I.	<a href="#">Advisory Council Mandate</a> .....	1
II.	<a href="#">Vision</a> .....	1
III.	<a href="#">Mission</a> .....	1
IV.	<a href="#">Advisory Council Membership</a> .....	1
V.	<a href="#">Public Participation</a> .....	1
VI.	<a href="#">Public Comments</a> .....	2
VII.	<a href="#">Committees</a> .....	2
VIII.	<a href="#">Communications</a> .....	3
IX.	<a href="#">Accomplishments and Activities</a> .....	3
X.	<a href="#">Recommendations</a> .....	6

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

## **Introduction**

The 2022-2023 Annual Report of the South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities (ACESD) outline the purposes, activities and accomplishments of the Council and are consistent with the South Carolina special education regulations and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### **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 Advisory Council is established by statute to include parents of students with disabilities, individuals with disabilities, K-12 general and special educators, 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 comments 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 2022-2023 year, the Advisory Council received two requests for public comment. Both requests were for the Advisory Council's March meeting. Lucy Noon, a special education teacher from Charleston County School District, submitted a comment to be read on her behalf. Ms. Noon expressed her frustration teaching in a self-contained preschool classroom with 13 special needs 3- and 4-year-olds with only one assistant. Ms. Noon recommended that the state look into setting student / teacher ratios within self-contained preschool classrooms. Her comments were forwarded to the Preschool Committee. Wednesday Jones, a state ambassador for Youth Choice, Youth Voice, presented in person to the Council. Ms. Jones talked about her organization's focus on supported decision making within the disability community and asked for the Council's assistance in taking a survey she had developed. The link to her survey was distributed via email to Advisory Council members.

## **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 **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.

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 **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 **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.

## **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.
- Selected members met with Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

### **Executive Committee**

The committee conducted four executive meetings to set the calendar / agenda, made recommendations for membership, reviewed bylaws, and performed oversight of the activities of the Advisory Council.

### **Preschool Committee**

There was increased representation on the Preschool Committee this year, including parents, Head Start, BabyNet, Family Connection, grant-funded projects that support children with disabilities, ABC Quality, DHEC-Division of Children & Youth with Special Healthcare Needs.

The committee heard from Chris Napier, the Recruitment, Retention, and Programs Team Lead to discuss the concerns the committee has related to teacher retention. The committee learned there are multiple programs under SC CREATE and other similar initiatives that are focused on recruitment of educational professionals to become certified to work with children with disabilities. The committee, along with Sherri Evans, the 619 preschool consultant from OSES, completed and submitted the Preschool Report to the legislature in January 2023. In March, the committee heard from members of the Suspension and Expulsion Workgroup about preschool issues. The workgroup is bringing together a broad stakeholder group to define the goals and expectations as well as building consensus to adopt definitions across sectors. The committee reviewed the South Carolina law and IDEA related to committee membership. The recommendations are to clean up the language and to add a representative from the Part C lead agency. There is also a question about the DHEC representative and if that position is still needed. It is assumed they were added back when BabyNet was under DHEC. This will be discussed in the August 2023 meeting.

The Preschool Committee plans to explore the following topics in 2023-24:

- Explore the ratio in public preschool classes (and are Least Restrictive Environment issues impacting class size).
- Explore the SC Law governing membership of this committee.
- Is there data related to the effects of COVID on students? How many children were born during this time and how are they doing?
- Support the transition process better.

## **Professional Development Committee**

The Professional Development Committee welcomed many new members this year, discussed the background and purpose of the committee, and recapped last reporting year's activities.

In August, the committee selected Allison Huffstutler and Anne Radue as co-chairs. The committee also concluded its work with the Transition and Self-Advocacy Committee on the letter of support regarding special education certification in South Carolina. This letter was approved by the Advisory Council and submitted to Superintendent Weaver for her consideration.

In October, the committee brainstormed how to generate more public interest in the Advisory Council. Ideas included a flyer, social media graphics, "elevator speech" and more. There was also discussion about organizations that we could potentially partner with in advertising upcoming meetings. The committee reviewed a draft flyer and graphic for social media in January, which were approved by the full Advisory Council in March.

The group has focused on the future direction of the committee, with discussions about professional development opportunities for educators, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), literacy, parent education, future speakers, community engagement, transition, other parent councils in the state and suspension and expulsion rates of preschoolers.

In March, the committee discussed Indicators 3 and 5 and what information and data was needed from OSES for future goals, authentic engagement and advising. The focus of future work narrowed in on parent training for the Individualized Education Program (IEP), LRE, advisory councils for school districts, and assessment data.

### **Safe Schools Committee**

The Safe Schools Committee welcomed new and returning members along with OSES representatives to the committee, discussed the background and purpose of the committee, and brainstormed ideas for the year including reports and activities since the last meeting in March 2022.

During the term, the committee reviewed myriad programs from across the state. The committee first reviewed the SC Coalition for Safer Schools 2023 Policy Agenda. The group felt this was well done and outlined many key areas that address school issues. The committee received and reviewed data from OSES on Indicators 4 (suspension and expulsion), 9 (significant disproportionate representation in individual categories), & 10 (percent of districts with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in specific disability categories). The committee received an update on the Palmetto Pyramid Policy Partners Project (P4) and Handle with Care in SC. The committee received an overview of a project looking at School Resource Officers and District Memorandums of Understanding. The group discussed the School Resource Officer Association, and their conferences held each June and October. Advisory Council Vice Chair Susan Beck will be presenting at the June conference. Finally, the committee received an overview of the REAP Manual – a multidisciplinary approach to providing support to students experiencing a brain injury, their families, healthcare providers and schools was obtained at the Brain Injury Association of SC on concussion in youth.

### **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.

The committee wrapped up a letter of encouragement that was jointly written with the Professional Development Committee on revisiting the teacher certification process in our state to ensure we are removing any barriers to hire capable and qualified teachers we are in desperate need of. The remainder of the year the committee had heavy discussions regarding the lack of clear, digestible, and accessible resources for parents on the breadth of transition in the IEP development process. The committee discussed various avenues of projects including resource development and distribution for families and asking OSES to share what current resources are being shared with families and how they are actively ensuring proper preparation and expectations.

The committee has decided to focus next year's efforts on how OSES can address the issue of parents and students with disabilities being unaware of the impact a modified curriculum in an IEP has on their child's ability to earn a state recognized high school diploma. The committee would love for OSES to make greater efforts to inform parents of the various pathways their students with disabilities may take throughout their K-12 school careers at a much earlier age, and understand the full breadth of implications one pathway can have from diploma, higher education, and employment opportunities, and ultimately successful post-school outcomes and quality of life.

### **Accomplishments for 2022-2023:**

- The Advisory Council created a Procedure Guide that is currently under review.
- The Advisory Council is starting to become more visible within the state and has made connections with other organizations that serve students with disabilities within the state.
- The Advisory Council now has publicity materials to distribute online in hopes of engaging more with community members and gathering more public comment about the education of students with disabilities in the state.
- Members of the Advisory Council offered more stakeholder feedback this year to OSES. Members provided feedback on the SSIP and served on the committees reviewing the Standards for Evaluation and Eligibility Determination document.
- The Advisory Council submitted a letter of encouragement to the Superintendent discussing the need to reconsider the certification process for educators within special education.

## **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.

Second, as outlined in the letter of encouragement, the Advisory Council recommends that the SCDE 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 Advisory Council wonders if the state's current system of certifying special-education teachers could be improved.

Third, Least Restrictive Environment and transitions were two topics repeatedly discussed across committees this year. The Advisory Council recommends that OSES: 1) support LRE determinations in preschool (provide support for the Least Restrictive Environment in Preschool and Continuum of Placements letter dated September 4, 2019); 2) investigate concerns about districts overusing home-based educational services as the LRE for students with disabilities; and 3) find a way to discuss transitions from level to the next much earlier with parents so that they understand that decisions they make early on can impact their child's educational path.

Finally, the SCDE needs to be transparent and clear with the data they are sharing, specifically making it meaningful and usable to the majority of the Advisory Council. Parents and individuals with disabilities want to hear about the active next steps the SCDE is taking in addressing things like low graduation rates or low diploma earnings for our students with disabilities, and places where their input can be heard and acted upon.

## **Appendix A**

### 2022 – 2023 Full Council Meeting Calendar South Carolina Advisory Council for Educating Students with Disabilities

All meetings were held virtually.

August 30, 2022  
October 28, 2022  
January 27, 2023  
March 24, 2023

## **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 2022-2023

Cherolyn Allen  
Greta Bailey  
Emily Beasley  
Susan Beck  
Kelly Birmingham  
Valarie Bishop  
Anna Bleasdale / Susan Luberoff  
Kathy Bryant  
Jennifer Buster  
Amanda Campbell  
Shana Charles  
Jay Collins  
Mary Lynne Diggs / Senekita Farmer  
Valoree Duquette  
Suzanne English  
Robin Frierson  
Jeni Garner  
Danshelle Guy  
Amy Holbert  
Susan Howard  
Allison Huffstutler  
Louise Johnson  
Kerri Kannengieser  
Cathy Kovacs  
Karma Marshall  
Padgett Mozingo  
Sadina Outlaw  
Kimberly Perry  
Shannon Polchow  
Anne Radue  
Tyler Rex  
Emily Sirico  
Heather Smith Googe  
Elizabeth Smithson  
Cara Smithwick  
Nina Spinelli  
Mary Stevenson  
Meghan Trowbridge  
Monica Tudder  
Laura Vazquez  
Danielle Verwers  
Paige Winget  
Birley Wright  
Elizabeth Young

## **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 the full preschool report here.](#)