Council On Educational Services

For Exceptional Children

 North Carolina State Advisory Panel

2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT

Cynthia Daniels-Hall, Chairperson

Staff support provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Exceptional

Children Division

Sherry Thomas, Director

# Council on Educational Services for Exceptional Children

# North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

# Exceptional Children Division

# **Introduction**

The individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) requires that every state establish and maintain a state advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the state. The federal regulations specify membership and require a majority, of the membership be parents of children with disabilities and individuals with disabilities.

Specifically, the regulations require the following membership include:

* Parents of children with disabilities ages birth through 26
* Individuals with disabilities
* Teachers
* Representatives of institutions of higher education that prepare special education and related services personnel
* State and local education officials, including officials who carry out activities under subtitle B of title VII of the *McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act*
* Administrators of programs for children with disabilities
* Representatives of other state agencies involved in the financing and delivery of related services to children with disabilities
* Representatives of private schools and public charter schools
* Representative of vocational, community, or business organization concerned with the provision of transition services to children with disabilities
* Representative of the State Child Welfare agency responsible for foster care
* Representative from the state Juvenile Justice and adult corrections agencies

The Council on Educational Services for Exceptional Children (CESEC) is established in accordance with Section 300.167-300.169 of the federal regulations, Section 1412(a)(21) of the Individuals with Disabilities

Educational Act (IDEA 2004) and Section 115C-121.1 of the North Carolina General Statutes as the State Advisory Panel to the State Board of Education. The purpose of the Council is to:

* Advise the Board of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities:
* Comment publicly on rules and regulations proposed by the Board regarding the education of children with disabilities:
* Advise the Board in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the United States Secretary of Education as required by IDEA:
* Advise the Board in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports required by IDEA:
* Assist the Board in developing and implementing policies related to the coordination of services for students with disabilities; and
* Carry out any other responsibilities as designated by federal law or the State Board of Education.

# **Membership**

The Council shall consist of a minimum of 25 members. Currently, the Council consists of 25 members - 17 appointees and 8 ex-officio. Members are appointed by the Governor, President Pro Tem of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and the State Board of Education. Appointees represent individuals with disabilities from the ranks of parents, teachers, higher education, public and private schools, business/vocational community, and charter schools. A majority of the representatives shall be parents of children with disabilities and persons with disabilities. The term of appointment for members appointed by the State Board of Education is four years. All other terms are two years.

The current list of members of the Council can be found at this web address:

<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/classroom-resources/exceptional-children/parent-resources>

# Committee Organization

The activities of the Council on Education Services for Exceptional Children are governed by the North Carolina State Board of Education bylaws for Advisory Committees. The CESEC delegates various subcommittees to monitor issues and concerns.

# Committee work:

The Council operates four committees to help meet the legislative purpose of the Council. These committees are the Executive Committee, the Unmet Needs Committee, the Reports and Data Committee, and the Policy and Procedures Committee.

**The Executive Committee** – Cynthia Daniels-Hall, Chair

Primary Functions

* Set meeting agendas
* Draft the Annual Report

**The Unmet Needs Committee** - Diane Coffey, Chair

Primary Functions

* Identify unmet needs impacting Special Education in NC
* Establish priorities for the committee
* Determine topics for Council action relative to unmet needs of stakeholders involved in Special Education programs including students, teachers, parents, and administrators.

The **Reports & Data Committee** - vacant, chair

Primary Function

* Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)
* Review data and advise on annual reports as needed.

**The Policies & Procedures Committee –** Christy Grant, Chair

Primary Function

* Comment publicly on rules or regulations proposed by the SEA regarding the education of students with disabilities
* Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for students with disabilities
* Revise the council’s by-laws
* Reviews and updates council operating procedures

# **Meetings**

The Council meets four times a year. During the 2020-2021 year, meetings were held on virtually on September 9, 2020, December 9, 2020, March 10, 2021, and June 9, 2021.

For the 2020-21 School Year, presentations were made by Department of Public Instruction staff, as well as other agencies and organizations.

# **Presentations:**

**September 2020:**

**Welcome, Call to Order, Introductions, Review of Agenda, Review of Meeting Minutes**

Chairperson Cynthia Daniels-Hall called the virtual meeting to order. Council members provided self-introductions and reviewed the day’s agenda. The June Summary of Actions was reviewed. The Council approved the June Summary of Actions with no comments or edits. Alexis Utz provided instructions for the Public Comment procedures.

**TAESE Debrief – Council Members**

John Copenhaver provided training for the Council. Chairperson Cynthia Daniels Hall felt that the training was effective and informative. She suggested that the Council members review the resources that were made available. Comments and concerns from those in attendance were shared. These concerns included going forward that the members are mindful that they represent ALL EC students and not just their individual children. The Council should keep track of state-wide issues presented during the meetings, and not to veer off into personal issues. Try not to use identifiers when speaking about names of schools, LEAs and children.

 It was suggested during the discussion that the by-laws include representation of all disabilities. However, by adding specific disability categories would limit those who want to serve on the Council. It was suggested that outside persons to provide information that the Council does not have knowledge of.

 These concerns will be taken into consideration in the Unmet Needs and Policies and Procedures committees.

**Agency Updates**

Exceptional Children Division Director, Sherry H. Thomas addressed the Council. Agency is still teleworking until Phase 3. Once Phase 3 is over, employees will begin staggered entry. Fridays will be for groups (based on appropriate numbers). Council meetings may continue virtually.

There will be no EC Conference in November. We are working on determining if Professional Development can be done virtually for the districts. The districts are recognizing outstanding educators on a quarterly basis

ECATS-MTSS module will be released in February 2021. Included in that platform, is an early warning system to be able to track students’ behavior, attendance, performance and making sure that students that are at risk are targeted.

EC Staff is stable at this point. There are just a couple of vacancies to be filled in the next few weeks.

**Contingency Plans**

Carol Ann Hudgens presented PowerPoint presentation in regard to using a contingency plan. It is not something that is required by the state. It is an option to document how an IEP will be implemented when there is an unexpected change. Each LEA is going to have their own procedure regarding the use of the contingency plan. In the case of the pandemic, the expected changes are in sudden shifts from remote learning to in-person learning and possibly back to remote learning should things worsen. The remainder of the presentation answered questions as it related to why contingency plans are good options for IEP teams to consider and when a contingency plan is needed. Other things to consider is will the child require additional services and support during an interruption? Are there services that need to be delivered with different frequency, intensity, and duration? Answering these questions will help the IEP teams determine if they need a contingency plan. Ms. Thomas presented a template that will be provided to the State regarding some critical features that may need to be considered. The template is just a suggestion, and not required. A copy of the presentation was made available to the Council.

**Beginning of the Year Assessments – Molly Britt and Shannon Jordan**

* Waivers for assessments from the spring did not carry over into the 2020-21 school year
* Information presented can be found on this document:

<https://files.nc.gov/dpi/documents/files/20-21-testing-program-overview.pdf>

* Passport for Learning: Grades 4-8 & Math 1 for reading and math; July 15-October 30
* Math Sets: Grades 4-8, Math 1 & Math 2 for math; available all year
* Released Tests: Grades 3-8, Eng 2, Biology, Math 1, Math 3; available all year
* Schoolnet: Grades 3-8 & HS courses; available all year
* Special Edition Tests Fall 2020: grades 4-8, Math 1, Math 2; academic achievement on the previous grade level standards
* Local decision to use the above 5 resources, not required

**Public Comments**

There were no Public Comments.

**Committee Work**

The goals and function of each committee were discussed before breaking into committee work.

**December 2020:
Welcome, Call to Order, Introductions, Review of Agenda, Review of Meeting Minutes**

Chairperson Cynthia Daniels-Hall called the virtual meeting to order. Council members provided self- introductions and reviewed the day’s agenda. The September Summary of Actions was reviewed. The Council approved the September Summary of Actions with no comments or edits. Alexis Utz provided instructions for the Public Comment procedures.

**What is ECAC- Terri Leyton-** Available Training Topics - Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) (ecac- parentcenter.org)

ECAC is committed to families of children with disabilities. They are a parent organization. All the parents are educators, and most staff are parents of children or young adults with disabilities. ECAC is considered a leader in the parent center movement. Every state is required to have at least one Parent Training and Information Center (PTI). ECAC has been North Carolina’s federally funded PTI since the Mid 1980s. All of their PTI work is related to the key purpose of IDEA.

**State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report- Nancy Johnson**

SPP/APR is one part of the general supervision responsibility of the state. APR report is submitted on February 1, 2021. SSP report is submitted on April 2, 2021. 17 indicators are reported.

Indicators 1 (graduation) and 8 (parent involvement) will be changing. Graduation: The State is now using a 5- year adjusted cohort rate, baseline will be 2015/16 entering 9th graders who graduated in 2019/20 or earlier, rate=73.1%, target=80%. Parent Involvement: changed survey (reduced from 25 questions to 17 questions), changed rate calculation, previous years’ rates= 42-46%, target=50%, current target=TBD.

There have been indicators impacted by COVID: overall impact, on specific indicators (3b-c, 11, 12, 13), strategies to mitigate the impact, COVID focus groups (rural/small, urban/large, charter, parents, & students). 3b-c (state assessments): no data, state received a waiver; 11 (child find/90-day timeline): delay reason added, slippage significant, 70% delays due to COVID; 12 (transition age 3) 80% delay due to COVID, slippage significant; 13 (transition secondary): delay in monitoring due to COVID (data collection), monitors reviewing IEPs virtually. EC Division has added weekly office hours to help troubleshoot with directors.

Future items (2020-2025): work will occur throughout 2021 for the submission on Feb. 1, 2022. Input from stakeholder groups, set targets, changes to data/source for indicators 1 (graduation) & 2 (drop-out), new components for indicator 3 (state assessments)—reporting data on reading & math in grades 4, 8, high school; new components for indicator 6 () -- reporting, change to the due date for indicator 17 (SSIP), other minor changes/clarifications.

**LEA Self -Assessment Statewide Summary-Lauren Holahan**

The State Systemic Improvement Plan works from the theory that local districts will look at the root cause of why students with disabilities are graduating disproportionately. It is lower than that of non-disabled students.

Based on what the root causes are, the LEA or Charter School selects evidence-based practices to address those causes and then provide professional development and request help from DPI for technical assistance. DPI will allocate resources through the regional support structure to make sure that LEAs and Charter Schools have the support they need to implement evidence-based practices. Lauren reviewed the statewide data to date. (An electronic copy of this presentation is available)

**Agency Updates**

Exceptional Children Division Assistant Director, Matt Hoskins addressed the Council.

Update on the school mental health policy that has been years in the making. The policy passed in November (Senate Bill 476/Session Law 2020-7) The components of the policy include Universal prevention through core instruction, early intervention for mental & social-emotional health, referral/treatment, and re-entry information.

As far as an update concerning OSEP, the Division has not received the final report from their visit.

We are currently working on a new strategic plan. Council members should have received a draft of the plan to give feedback (via survey). Each goal has action steps and evidence of success to determine the progress and success of each goal. The first goal is related to eliminating opportunity gaps by 2026. This is a 5-year plan. The second goal is improving school and district performance in that time. The third goal is related to ensuring that educators are prepared to meet the needs of the students. The fourth goal is related to continuing to optimize collaboration and engagement with stakeholders, which would include the Council.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel the Annual EC Conference. A lot of people depend on this conference for professional learning and CEUs towards licensure. EC Directors were polled to get an idea of what could be done in place of the conference. A virtual conference option was developed. Sessions will be provided in December, January, and February. An analysis will be done to determine if more sessions are needed. DPI has access to CANVAS, which is a learning management platform that we have been trained to use. It has been opened statewide for more people to have access.

Covid-19 relief funding. To date, we’ve been able to allot close to $37 million for extraordinary costs associated with serving students with disabilities during the pandemic. The funds are available until December 30th, so we’re working closely with LEAs to make sure we can use those funds by the end of the year.

**State Complaints Update- Leigh Mobley**

There are currently 78 open complaints. 11 have been insufficient, some have been withdrawn. On target for 160 complaints by the end of the fiscal year compared to 119 from last year. Top 5 issues: COVID related: implementation of IEP and development, review, revision of IEPS; child find, placement decisions, and prior written notice. End of year report gets posted on the ECD website.

**Public Comments**

There was an emailed comment regarding the failure to provide FAPE to eligible students by dragging out the IEP process for almost a year. The parent provided a written request, and the process should have been completed by March 2020 (before the pandemic), but the process is still incomplete.

**Committee Work**

The goals and functions of each committee were discussed before breaking into committee work.

**March 2020:**

**Welcome, Call to Order, Introductions, Review of Agenda, Review of Meeting Minutes**

Chairperson Cynthia Daniels-Hall called the virtual meeting to order. Council members provided self-introductions and reviewed the day’s agenda. The December Summary of Actions was reviewed. The Council approved the December Summary of Actions with no comments or edits. Alexis Utz provided instructions for the Public Comment procedures.

**EC Licensure-Test Concerns- Kim Evans –** Ms. Evans oversees PEPSC (Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission. [Presentation](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bAWK3pMXSuQ4ncCRwmI7yTE42_PWPKe7/view?usp=sharing)

Ms. Evans gave a detailed overview of test results and pass rates for the EC-GC (Exceptional Children-General Curriculum). In the Reading and Math subtests for the first attempts versus the EC Core tests, the pass rates were lower. The EC Core Licensure exam had a higher pass rate than the Reading and Math subtests.

**State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report- Nancy Johnson**

2020 SPP/APR - submitted Feb. 1st

-Indicator 8 (parent involvement): Parent responses to revised survey (25 questions to 17 questions, increased response rate, new baseline because of changing survey, 49.36% parents responded, “strongly agree” and “agree”, similar rate to previous years although slightly higher)

-Indicator 13 (transition). Dropped in rate to 56.42% from ~80%--possibly due to suspension in monitoring because of COVID and change to ECATS.

-Next Steps: Clarification Period with state and OSEP, posting LEA & SPP/APR reports, and state determinations.

\*2020-2025 SPP/APR Report

-Kelley Blas and Lauren Hollahan will be leading this work moving forward as Nancy prepares to retire.

-General Requirements: Stakeholder Involvement-expanded information needed to report. New targets for Indicators 1-17 through 2025-Council will provide input for this. Indicator 17 data now due Feb. 1 instead of April 1st.

-Changes: Chart of changes in presentation to view at leisure. Please email Alexis (alexis.utz@dpi.nc.gov) with questions for Nancy. I will compile a list to send to her.

-Opportunities for Stakeholder Engagement/Feedback. Two meetings per topic (repeat sessions) are being set up for stakeholder groups. April-SWOT/Indicator 1 &2, May-Indicator 3, June-Indicator 5 &6

**-**Next Steps: ECD finalizing plan of activities, roles, & timelines for completing SPP/APR (due 2/1/22). Council will receive invitations for participation in stakeholder meetings.

**Agency Updates**

Mental Health Initiative

NC Healthy Schools has created a [website](https://sites.google.com/dpi.nc.gov/nchealthyschools/home) to support school-based mental health. This was born out of a law from June 2020 that required NCDPI to develop a school-based mental health policy. The policy requires that mental health and social-emotional support must be addressed. [Requirements](https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Policy/ViewPolicy.aspx?S=10399&revid=cftplusNNeYfPochIgmWqDYJA==&PG=6&st=shlt-003&mt=Exact) from State Board of Education. Schools must adopt and implement a plan for promoting student mental health & well-being by July 1, 2021. Samples have been provided to schools on the various requirements of the [Statute](https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2019/Bills/Senate/PDF/S476v6.pdf).

Social-Emotional Learning state team has developed strategies for schools to support students as they return to classroom; they developed a [website](https://sites.google.com/dpi.nc.gov/ncdpiselremotelearning/home) for Evidence-based Practices for schools; webinars/trainings.

Technical Correction: SLD Policy Change

This came about as part of the State Complaint. Policies were 90% of IDEA language but new changes will use even more of IDEA language. Trainings (webinars) and numerous documents have been provided to LEAs to support the necessary changes brought about from the complaint. EC Office hours have been held weekly in February and scheduled throughout the future months for problem-solving sessions.

Strategic Plan -[Strategic Plan](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kJo-Q2jVo80Bect8HRagaKv5s4iiUphh/view?usp=sharing)

This is the final version of the Strategic Plan for EC Division. Council members used the opportunity to provide feedback. One of the things created from some of that feedback was a glossary at the end that explained terms, titles and courses.

EC Division is now with the Office of Equity, we are focused on equity as part of our reorganization with Superintendent Truitt coming on board. Our organization now reports to Dr. Catherine Edmonds.

**Public Comments**

 There was an emailed comment asking what measures were in place to notify parents of absences during an IEP meeting, and what responsibilities are in place for application of an IEP. The email will be forwarded to Alexis to address as it is not for the Council.

**Committee Work**

Committee Goals:

 Policies and Procedures – Issues proposed to the group were group norms and social media presence. They came up with a set of proposed group norms that may be available at the start of each meeting as a reminder of some guidelines for participation. (will be shared at next meeting) It was also discussed having a person or group of people on the Advisory Council who will keep up with the Council’s presence on social media.

 Unmet Needs – They are still looking for ways to address transportation issues with contract vehicles. Making sure they have swing out stop signs, flashing lights and “Official School Transportation” on at least three sides of the vehicle. They also wanted to add the establishment of support groups for EC parents, support groups for EC students.

All committees were asked to complete their section of the 19-20 Annual Report.

**June 2020:**

**Welcome, Call to Order, Introductions, Review of Agenda, Review of Meeting Minutes**

Chairperson Cynthia Daniels-Hall called the virtual meeting to order.  Council members provided self-introductions and reviewed the day’s agenda.  The March Summary of Actions was reviewed.  The Council approved the March Summary of Actions with no comments or edits. Alexis Utz provided instructions for the Public Comment procedures.

Appointments: Senator Ted Alexander and parent Mrs. Elizabeth DeBiasi, were appointed by the NC General Assembly and will begin their terms in July 2021.  Dianne Coffey and Christy Hutchinson have requested a second term and were reappointed by the State Board last week. Representative Larry Strickland completed his first term and was reappointed by the NC General Assembly. Virginia Moorefield has completed her second term with the Council.

**SPP/APR Report Update –Lauren Hollahan/Kelly Blaas** [Overview PPT](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-9R0vsm33xsBY6J0p-czV50KB05NmZEK/view?usp=sharing)

Lauren shared the link to the stakeholder invite ([-Invite](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1903D7g8utUpt2o-en5E1uHcovFH8oSi0drW9q1AiDP8/edit)). The performance indicators can be found in the invitation. Two meetings were held in April. At that time, Indicators 1 (graduation rate) and 2 (dropout rate) were discussed. They did a self-assessment of the EC Division and shared it with the stakeholders in order to get feedback on the infrastructure. May’s meeting dealt with Indicator 3 (reading and math proficiency), and a continuation of EC Division’s self-assessment. In June, the plan is to review Indicator 14 (post-school outcomes), and then Indicator 7 (preschool outcomes). They will continue feedback on self-assessment. Indicator 4 will be addressed in October.

 Kelly shared the demographics of participants from the previously held meetings. (See Powerpoint) She explained the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) process and how they received stakeholder feedback back in April. They will be doing a much more in-depth infrastructure in the fall.

 A draft of the SPP/APR report will be drafted in November/December and will be shared with the Council for feedback.

**Agency Updates – Sherry Thomas/Matt Hoskins**

School Extension Learning Recovery & Enrichment Programs - Special ed. students are not necessarily “at-risk” if they are making progress on IEP goals. Must meet the school’s definition of “at-risk” to participate in the summer learning. It’s not an extension of the school year (not required) and special ed. students are not required to attend. If they are eligible for ESY services, that is different and would receive services outside of the school’s optional summer learning opportunity.

-Federal increase: IDEA 611 Grant (part B school-age) is $377,384,354 (an increase), the supplement award is an additional $81.3 million (no admin. cost from this amount- all goes to LEAs). Total award is $458,744,760. IDEA 619 Grant (preschool) is $11.6 million, supplemental $6.1 million (no admin. cost from this amount- all goes to LEAs), total $17.7 million.

-Project AWARE: $8.8 million grant to support mental health for students within the school and building community partnerships.

-State Board alignment: Working with the SBE to align mental health & social emotional learning goals.

-NC has developed a vision & goals for SEL, completed SEL standards mapping, modeling/sharing 3 signature practices, and begun an SEL & equity project with 42 LEAs.

-OSEP Report: Provided information about the monitoring visit and corrective action required by OSEP. Asked for guidance about PRTF’s before visit but OSEP included this in their research and issued corrective action on this topic with no guidance. See PowerPoint slides (Agency Updates-linked on left) for information regarding corrective actions required to be completed by August 2021.

-The 70th Conference on Exceptional Children will be held in-person this fall!! (Nov 17-19, 2021) at the Koury Convention Center, Sheraton Greensboro Hotel at Four Seasons

**Public Comments**

 There was an emailed comment around how services are being provided for children with chromic medical needs. The Council decided that additional information was needed in order to address the concerns. It was suggested that maybe an expert from DHHS could share information on the topic.

**Committee Work**
2020-2021 Annual Report is due to the State Board by September 15th, 2021

# **Recommendations:**

Support Teachers, Professionals and Staff, health and safety

Continued support for Parent and Community Awareness and Engagement (Parent Newsletter)

Social and Emotional Learning