

Council on Educational Services for Exceptional Children

North Carolina State Advisory Panel

2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Diane H Coffey, Chairperson
Aimee Combs, Vice-Chairperson

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

Carol Ann Hudgens, Senior Director

Council on Educational Services for Exceptional Children

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Office of Exceptional Children

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:

2023-2024 Annual Report

- 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 24 members. Currently, the Council consists of 28 members - 23 appointees and 6 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 communities, 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 on the [Resources for Families and Students](#) page of the Office of Exceptional Children website.

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 – Diane H Coffey, 2023-24 Chair

Primary Functions

- Set meeting agendas
- Draft the Annual Report

The Unmet Needs Committee - Aimee Combs, 2023-24 Chair

Primary Functions

- Identify unmet needs impacting Special Education in NC
- Establish priorities for the committee

2023-2024 Annual Report

- 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** – vacant, 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

September 2023

During this month's meeting, the Council heard updates from the Office of Exceptional Children (OEC). These included information about the 2023 determination letter on state implementation of IDEA from the U.S. Department of Education: North Carolina received the designation of "needs assistance" based on a combination of outcome and compliance indicator results. The OEC will continue to utilize federal technical assistance in working to support systemic improvements. The OEC implemented an online Activities Guide for 2023-24 to support staff retention as attrition is a concern statewide: all professional development for students with disabilities is easily accessible on the public calendar. The plan is to identify areas in which PSUs are losing staff to align resources for retention. There are 203,000 SWD and 364 PSUs statewide. Struggles with recruitment are reflected in the number of statewide complaints. The Council provided feedback on retaining related service providers. The Council business included introducing new members and electing a new Vice Chair.

There was an in-person public comment about complaints filed with the OEC. Subcommittees did not meet this session.

December 2023

This month, the Council received information from the OEC with updates on staffing and new hires, the Early Childhood Section, Rulemaking, Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds, and end-of-year data review for Dispute Resolution and Indicator 11 (90-day timeline) data. Some complaints were related to barriers to meeting timelines due to staff shortages. ESSER funds expire on Sept. 30, 2024, and depending on how the district has chosen to budget funds, there could potentially

be a decrease in supplemental services made available to all students with these funds. The Office of Learning Recovery has resources on its website with more details on supporting districts in this area.

Based on presented information and discussion, the Council recorded the following recommendations:

- Consider funding and support for students in educator training programs at IHEs.
- Consider salary increases for exceptional children's teachers, reinstate longevity pay, and increase salaries based on years of experience. Teacher pay in North Carolina is ranked at 40th in the nation.
- Consider reinstating the pay incentive for obtaining a master's degree.
- Consider removing the cap on teacher pay at Year 15.
- Consider paying preservice teachers for internships / student-teacher supervision.
- ECAC could create a video on various options for processes available for parents.
- Consider an Exceptional Children Parent Advisory Board.

There was no public comment and subcommittees did not meet.

March 2024

The OEC and representatives from Exceptional Children's Assistance Center, Legal Aid of North Carolina, Right to Education Project, Mental Health Therapy Alliance, and Center for Safer Schools shared information during today's meeting. The OEC reviewed the status of proposed changes to the exceptional children funding model, discussed the December 1 child count increase of 10,000 students from December 2022 to December 2023, and reminded the Council of the upcoming Office of Special Education Programs Differentiated Monitoring and Support visit in 2026. Reports from parent/caregiver groups focused on current issues impacting students including transportation, behaviors, suspensions, charter schools not meeting Child Find requirements, language access issues for parents, professional development, threat assessment teams (House Bill 605) for the 2024-25SY, and House Bill 142 related to penalties and definitions for certain sex offenses against students, misconduct and an informational video about sexual abuse developed for students in Grades 6 to 12.

Based on presented information and discussion, the Council recorded the following recommendations:

- Ensure that OEC staff, ECAC, and experts have access to the videos required by House Bill 142.

One written statement was submitted, which focused on the need for equity in discipline for neurodiverse students, the need for accurate incident and demographic data being maintained, and the need to implement strategies to help students with over-stimulation develop necessary self-regulation skills.

Subcommittees did not meet.

Council Recommendation to the State Board of Education

- Consider funding and support for students who will study education in IHEs.
- Consider salary increases for exceptional children’s teachers, reinstate longevity pay, and increase salaries based on years of experience. Teacher pay in North Carolina is ranked at 40th in the nation.
- Consider reinstating the pay incentive for obtaining a master’s degree.
- Consider removing the cap on teacher pay at Year 15.
- Consider paying preservice teachers for internships / student-teacher supervision.
- ECAC could create a video on various options for processes available for parents.
- Consider an EC Parent Advisory Board.
- Ensure OEC staff, ECAC, and experts have access to videos required by House Bill 142.