

COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

March 2024

Summary of Actions

Welcome, Call to Order, Introductions, Review of Agenda, Review of Meeting Minutes – March 2024

Chairperson Diane Coffey virtually called the meeting to order. There was a quorum present, with 15 members present.

Summary of Actions September 2023 and December 2023 approved.

Agency Updates – Dr. Carol Ann Hudgens (PPT located in Council Google Drive.)

Dr. Hudgens began by providing the Council with an update on personnel changes that occurred since the last meeting. Johanna Lynch, new parent liaison, started February 14. Danyelle Sanders will transition to a new role with the State Board of Education this month.

Updates:

EC Funding Model Update:

- Statewide stakeholder engagement
- Beta Testing (3 phases)
- State Board of Education (SBE) meetings Dec., Jan., March
- Spring Director's Institute

Critical variables:

- Dec. 1 count
- Established a base of state dollars
- Continue special grants
- Weighted elements: environments, intensity of services, staff ratio
 - Level One: Reg, RECP, 1:30 ratio for teachers and related services
 - Level Two: Resource, PreK separate class, 1: (TBA) ratio teachers and related services

- Level Three: Resource (ECS), Separate class, separate school/home/hospital, residential, 1:9 ratio for teachers and related services
- Key points: Formula, removes the 13% cap, not only a funding formula, not a required staffing plan

New: SBE in March, report to G.A. in March for short session, share out at EC Director Institute

Increase in Dec. 1 child count from Dec. 2022 to Dec. 2023 – 10,000 increase

OSEP – Differentiation Monitoring Support Visit upcoming

SPP/APR – Move to the next meeting

Reports from parent / caregiver groups:

Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) – Aimee Combs
(PPT located in Google Drive)

- PTI - Parent Training and Information Center - from IDEA law/regs
- Serves all 100 counties at no cost, individual assistance.
- Assist connecting with local resources, training on IDEA and system changes, using their voice to impact systems.
- Focus on resolving disputes within the school buildings/system before going up the chain of command.
- Areas of focus: Eligibility, placement, service delivery, behavior, data
- Acknowledge and be more forthcoming there are unqualified or unfilled positions.
- Connection between MDR and suspensions over 10 days at this point of the year without looking back at the data/relook at IEP.
- Trending Now: communication breakdowns, ESA+, discipline, principals, charter school.
- New trend in assistive technology, one size fits all with students who have communication needs.
- 800 unduplicated parent referrals from Jan. 1 to March 1
- 1-800-962-6817, www.ecas-parentcenter.org

Legal Aid of North Carolina & Right to Education Project (REP) –
Rebecca Cathcart and Hetali Lodaya
(PPT located in Google Drive)

This specific team focuses on state education justice programs.

Topic issues since 2022:

- Transportation issues leading to EC students facing discipline missing school/services.
- Constructive suspensions – parents called to “pick up” their child.
- Charter School issues – not understanding their child find and service obligations, not following their own policies related to restorative discipline and families being pushed out.
- Language access issues.
- Training and professional development – ongoing carry out their training with fidelity.
- Culture of seeing students as “behaviors” rather than people leading to default to exclusion/punishment and low expectations of students with unaddressed needs.
- Exclusion and punishment of students with disabilities rather than individualized, data-based support, including students with documented experiences of unaddressed bullying
- Ongoing bullying situations reported but not addressed with Title IX, a mandatory reporting process.

Mental Health Therapy Alliance – Jessica Aguilar

- Assists families with barriers, stigma for children with mental health issues, specifically focused on the Spanish-speaking community.
- Personal story of her personal twins, experienced challenges in early intervention placements into school age.
- Trends: ESL teacher doesn’t speak perfect Spanish; parents feel like they are asked to sign IEP or document without interpreter; limited schools with students who have IDD; behaviors there are not acceptable; and parents don’t have the confidence to speak up as they are scared; concerns about parents who are illegal and don’t want to file due process because they will be deported.

Center for Safer Schools – Karen Fairley

Center for Safer Schools (CFSS) hub of information and technical assistance on school safety to school faculty and staff – focus to support PSUs.

Prevention, mitigation, response, recovery, reunification

- New staff coming on board in each region to ensure the Exceptional Children population is considered in decision making. Experts will inform executive staff.

- House Bill 605 – Threat assessment teams (Fall 2024-25) required by all NC schools, establish peer-to-peer student support programs at all schools with Grade 6 and higher.
- Behavioral threat assessment is not punitive, not reinforcing the school to prison pipeline (not profiling!), it is about the behavior of the child. This will be an evidence-based approach for identifying individuals who might pose a threat and for providing intervention before a violent incident occurs.
- School Climate: Schools are overwhelmed, but this team is necessary to have a diverse team of individuals (administrators, coaches, EC representatives, teachers, front office, SROs, etc.).
- Videos will be provided by Center for School Safety to all public schools in NC that will be required in the first five days of school annually for students and staff.
- House Bill 142 – Modifies penalties and definitions for certain sex offenses against students, increase penalties for failure of school admin to report misconduct to SBE, requires PSU to show students in Grades 6-12 a video to inform about sexual abuse.
- 115C-12(21) – monitoring violence in public school
- 2022-23 consolidated data report, discipline manual, PSUs are more aware of proper reporting, discipline survey will be sent to public schools this summer, RISE back to school safety summit

Council Business

Not applicable.

Discussion Items

- Clarifying question regarding the significant increase in our December count. Dr. Hudgens stated this was a nationwide trend. COVID may have caused a lack of access to early intervention for a few years and students are now getting access / placed; balance of “lack of access to high quality math/ELA instruction” as a rule out factor while erring on the side of caution.
- Make sure EC staff / ECAC / experts have access to videos released by the Center for Safer Schools to consider the needs of exceptional students – possibly social stories, visual reminders.

Public Comment

Submitted written statement

No additional comments were submitted the day of the meeting.

Effie Carter, Polk County:

Ms. Carter wrote about the need for equity in discipline for neurodiverse students. She focused on the need for accurate incident and demographic data in PowerSchool, and on implementing better strategies to help students manage over-stimulation and to develop necessary skills for self-regulation.

Meeting adjourned at 12:34 p.m.