

COUNCIL ON EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

September 11, 2019

Summary of Actions

Welcome, Introductions, Review of Agenda, Review of Meeting Minutes, Nominations for Chairperson, Vice Chairperson

Chairperson Leanna George called the meeting to order. Council members provided self-introductions. Anna Carter, Cache Owens, Cynthia Daniels-Hall, Jennifer Degen-Mullis and Kristin Hodges participated virtually. Visitors also provided self-introductions.

The Council approved the June meeting minutes without edits.

Leanna advised the Council she would be willing to serve a second term as Chairperson but is willing to accept any recommendations. Christy Hutchinson was a recommendation as an officer if the Chair or Vice Chair are stepping down. Council was advised to submit recommendations by lunchtime and voting will take place later in the afternoon. However, in reviewing the Bylaws, the Chairperson is allowed to only serve a one-year term.

Mental Health First Aid

REBECCA WILL FURNISH UPTODATE FACTS/FIGURES AND #S

Presenter Rebecca Fescina is a former EC teacher, certified Youth Mental Health First Aid trainer and works closely with Johnston Co Schools. She also works with PTAs and conducts community education around mental health and does presentations/trainings outside of the classroom including the caregiver aspect.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the national/worldwide intervention piece for a person developing a mental health or substance use problem, or experiencing a mental health crisis. The purpose is to provide "first aid" not a diagnosis or treatment.

The MHFA training is an 8-hour workshop generally with two trainers. Participants learn risk factors and warning signs of mental health and substance use problems; information on depression, anxiety, trauma, psychosis and substance abuse; a 5-step action plan to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or in crisis; and the available evidence-based professional, peer and self help resources locally and nationally.

ALEGEE is the acronym used for:

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm**
- Listen nonjudgmentally**
- Give reassurance and information**
- Encourage appropriate professional help**
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies**

ALEGEE is the "process" to use in working with potential mental health first aid.

Why Mental Health First Aid? Mental health problems are common and learn how to notice when someone needs help; Stigma is associated with mental health problems and MHFA promotes understanding; Professional help is not always on hand and learn to encourage community members to support one another; individuals with mental health problems often do not seek help and learn to help more people get the help they need and many people are not well informed and don't know how to respond and learn how to intervene. It may save a life.

Many people in various scenarios have four (4) great reasons to become a mental health first aider; 1-be prepared; 2-mental illnesses are common; 3-you care; and 4-you can help someone. The overarching purpose is to intervene and link that person with resources based on each individual situation.

In NC, there are approximately 72,000 MHFA trained individuals. Alliance Health has 16 trained trainers in adult and youth mental health first aid. School guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, administrators are some of the trained individuals but "appropriate people" to train varies per school/school system/organization.

There are various training modules to include a focus on various populations such as military with PSD and other disorders; higher education to focus on college and university students, first responders/law enforcement/public safety,

etc. People with increased stress factors correlate to increased suicide attempts (or successes). Alliance Health website provides training opportunities and residence of training location is not required.

There is common verbiage used relative to MHFA which is to encourage people to learn the skills, to help people experiencing a mental health or substance abuse challenge because anyone, anywhere can be the difference in someone's life.

While extremely beneficial, MHFA training is not free. Training manuals are \$20 each. However, Rebecca does conduct free community youth mental health first aid with an open forum format. MHFA closed courses are also offered for organizations. MHFA is important to employers because 1 in 5 American adults experience a mental illness each year; employer face an estimated \$80-\$100 billion indirect costs relating to mental illness and substance abuse; and 10.8 million fulltime workers have a substance use disorder. Organization training helps employees on all levels.

Government Support – The Mental Health First Aid Act of 2015 authorized \$20 million for mental health first aid to be offered to emergency services personnel, police, teachers/school administrators, primary care professionals, students, and others. Annual appropriations are \$15 million.

Youth MHFA is Rebecca's specialty and it introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents and builds understanding of the importance of early intervention.

ECATS Demo

Carol Ann Hudgens, Section Chief for Policy, Monitoring and Audit, went through the various screens within the ECATS system and provided screen explanations and provide clarity to Council questions about the screens.

Annual Report

Is an ongoing document in process. It appears the Annual Report will be completed and ready to submit to the State Board of Education in January.

Public Comments

There was one written public comment received relating to the ASD policy changes. Some content was very specific, but most of the concerns have already been addressed and this parent has also participated in a ASD stakeholder group.

Three people signed up for public comment.

Parent 1 reported the child has not received FAPE and school not complying with federal and state regulations. Parent utilized the formal complaint process with Office of Civil Rights and Exceptional Children Division. Both processes finding LEA in violation in May 2019. The plan set forth corrective action with a completion date of July 1. Public School Unit (PSU) corrective actions were not completed/complied with. Parent cannot find anyone to provide guidance for next steps and DPI not responsive to emails/calls. DPI has provided confusing/conflicting information along the way. "Frustrated parents" group growing larger and is multi-county wide. Parents are disappointed with DPI's response to noncompliant LEAs. Parent wants the Council to make it clear to the State Board of Education that every child deserves a free appropriate education.

Parent 2 advised the Council that what they think, hope and believe is happening in schools is not actually happening in reality. It's a battle zone. EC programs are a battleground and a struggle. This parent's concern tends to relate to dyslexic students Parent indicates the issues are systematic. NC has reading proficiency rate of 39.6%. This is not acceptable. NC is failing as a whole, failing students and parent is begging NC DPI to do something about it. PSUs do not follow the law and most don't know the law. Status quo is not working at all for dyslexia, SLD, reading and math. Structured literacy is suggested as way to teach reading. Fact is balanced literacy and whole word should come off the curriculum table. Please help our students. It takes all of us including legislators. Literacy is the key.

Parent 3 indicated that asking for help should get easier but it doesn't. Parent 3's mother and grandmother were teachers. Parent 3 has an 11 yr old AU daughter and high school son. Daughter received services early in school. Math programs in secondary education in Wake County are disastrous. Parent knows programs are written by common core writers. Programs based on group discovery learning, then re-directed to direct math instructions. This is negative for

sound-sensitive neurotypical students. Student in turn received poor grades in math and re-took half of the tests/exams. Student, even with parent assistance, was unable to complete math homework. No resources were provided. When Parent asked for resources only a workbook was provided. The workbook only contained questions; no glossary, no formulas, no explanations. This basically equated to the Parent being taken out of the academic equation all together. Parent began to mistrust teachers. Parent stresses that Wake County Schools should not be able to use curriculum without appropriate content. In two years of middle school, son did not receive any services.

The Council thanked the parents for their comments, concerns and the courage to come forth.

Committee Work

The Council desired to address the concerns of public comments and inquired if B6 of the Bylaws (Carry out any other responsibility as designated by federal law or the State Board) could be a catalyst to help with districts that are in noncompliance with corrective action relative to due processes. In general, the State Board or the federal government would have to specifically grant the Council the authority to act in a certain way and/or be given a directive.

As a followup to the parent information shared on corrective action timelines, the Policy, Monitoring and Audit Section is responsible for this activity and does not abandon the situation and monitors each case until it is fully closed. In worst case scenarios of prolonged, delayed completion, the PSU can have funds withheld as a consequence. For prolonged, unresolved cumulative complaints, the PSU would be publically noticed as noncompliance and would have to appear before the SBE to explain themselves. The EC Division is federally, and by the state, mandated to ensure general supervision is being upheld. Corrective actions don't dissolve or just go away.

The EC Division can share aggregate information, not case specific

Executive Committee

According to the Bylaws, the Chairperson is allowed to serve a single one-year term. So recommendations are needed for Chair and ViceChair so Council can vote.

Leanna reported the AU stakeholder meeting went well.

Executive Committee also suggested a change in agenda format. For presentations, it was suggested that time be allotted for a thorough Q&A and 10-15 minutes for Council to discuss any possible recommendations to put forth in the Annual Report relative to the presentation

Several subcommittees report the need for additional worktime between Council meetings. Webinars could be the vehicle for additional committee work time. Subcommittees do not fall within the open meeting laws so scheduling could be easier based on the subcommittee's schedule.

The Annual Report will add suicide protocols and Mental Health First Aid training as recommendations. These recommendations apply to all children, not just EC.

Policies & Procedures

It was suggested that maybe the Bylaws could be changed to revise the quorum criteria. Roberts Rules of Order indicates a quorum is 50% + 1 which is what is currently stated in Bylaws. However, the terminology within the Bylaws could be changed to mirror changes within the membership numbers since it may not always be a constant number. Any proposed change to the Bylaws would have to go through DPI attorneys.

Filling membership vacancies is past due. Membership needs legislative appts filled and a representative from Region 7. Sherry Thomas will reach out to Cecilia Holden and Wade Butner to prompt the legislative appt. recommendations. On a normal basis, elections should take place in March.

With additional work time in place, this committee would like to work on soliciting more public comment.

Reports & Data

Christy Hutchinson has agreed to chair this committee. Cynthia Daniels-Hall was previous chair and remains on the Council. This committee would like to secure information/data regarding Disproportionality warning lists from Nancy

Johnson. The purpose will be to plot data to discover if there are any statewide trends and any potential areas to address since December Council meeting includes a presentation on disproportionality.

Agency Updates

Sherry Thomas, Director of Exceptional Children Division, provided updates.

ASD policy change approved by State Board of Education. EC Division currently working on implementation plan with a target date of November 1 with resources to include a guidance document. The plan is to develop guidance docs; one for administrators (uTube with voiceover); one for special education and general education teachers; and one for parents. Reviewers' feedback is due by Oct. 15, then an internal team will review feedback so stakeholders will review one document. Again with the goal of a November 1 completion date. Then statewide training could begin. The EC Division will report to the State Board in December on ASD activity status. Full implementation target is January 1.

Sherry commended the ASD stakeholder group for its positive engagement and she is hopeful productive stakeholder groups will rise again.

Sherry has developed a new focus on parent engagement. Social media is a great tool if not used for negativity. EC Division will contact parent advocacy groups and offer up to five, free parent registrations to the EC Conference. ECAC, Family First, Easter Seals, TEACCH. Council can let Sherry know of any additional parent groups. Additionally, parents also receive a discounted conference rate.

EC Division has created a parent listserv. Parents can sign up via DPI website. The intent of the listserv is to provide resources for parents. Items will include "having public comment" on xyz topic, instructional practices, conference info, and policy changes are typical items. Can also use this to solicit Council parent vacancies. Sometimes there will be structured feedback portal (surveys).

New parent liaison, Alexis Utz, coming onboard Monday. Once settled, this listserv will be "owned/monitored" by parent liaison.

Some priorities for EC Division work include second-round meetings with the adaptive curriculum and working with teachers to clarify, provide teacher support and how to help unprepared teachers. Cleaning up the *Policies* – editing for types, SLD passed in 2015 which moves away from using discrepancy model to looking at RtI model. *Policies* currently state implementation is 2020 and it needs some clean up. *Policies* will go to State Board for final approval of edits.

Matt Hoskins was officially introduced as the new Assistant Director for the EC Division. Matt provided introductory statements and offered his services to the Council.

The EC Conference is Nov 20-21 at Koury Convention Center in Greensboro. Council members receive free general conference registration by using the following registration code: Code: #69EC19.

The meeting adjourned.