

**The Connecticut State Advisory Council
for Special Education**

Annual Report

2020



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APPENDIX A

State Advisory Council Membership Composition and Vacancies

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

My name is Tom Cosker and I am the proud parent of a child with a disability. I am also the Chair of the State Advisory Council (SAC) for Special Education. It is in this role that I deliver this message about the state of the SAC over the past 12 months.

This year we continued our efforts to fill vacancies on the Council and are now nearly at full membership. We have also had several individuals contact the Membership Committee and express their interest in the Council and some have attended meetings as interested members of the public. We continue to ensure that our process results in a membership Council that is diverse and representative of the State of Connecticut in terms of demographics, race and disability types. It is also important to note that we have increased our connections with legislators and now regularly have legislators attending our meetings. The SAC plans to continue this effort by expanding and strengthening our connection to legislators in the coming year.

We as a Council, have also worked this year to expand our presence and reach by working to spread the word about the SAC to legislators, work groups, other councils and commissions. We have worked to increase our presence on a variety of councils, committees, and work groups related to our work for students and children with disabilities by providing our input and expertise on a variety of topics.

As can be expected the SAC continues to work hard to fulfill its obligations on our many charges, two of which are to:

- advise the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) of unmet needs in educating children with disabilities; and
- comment on pending legislation around special education.

To this end, we have provided recommendations on our four focus areas to the CT State Department of Education (CSDE) as well as to the Legislature. We have also been able to provide input and feedback at public hearings on pending legislation related to special education and details of this work can be found in this report. This past year, we also worked to update our focus areas as our work continues on a variety of fronts.

Lastly, let me say that the amazing group of parents, students and professionals that make up the membership of the SAC, is as knowledgeable, passionate, and committed a group as I have had the pleasure of working with in my time advocating for children with disabilities. We are very fortunate to have such a group of people assembled in one council.

In closing, the SAC has been very busy and productive this past year and I look forward to being part of the work the Council accomplishes in the coming year. I would like to extend an invitation to you to join us at our next meeting on March 18, 2020, at CREC, 111 Charter Oak Avenue – 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06106. You can find all meeting times and locations on our webpage on the CSDE website under Special Education: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/CT-State-Advisory-Council-on-Special-Education>.

Thank you,



Tom Cosker, Chair, State Advisory Council for Special Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Connecticut State Advisory Council for Special Education ("SAC" or "Council") has established authority under Section 10-76i of the Connecticut General Statutes and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 34 CFR Section 300.169. The Council's purpose is to advise the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) of unmet needs in educating students with disabilities and to recommend to the General Assembly any changes to the law, regulations, standards and guidelines pertaining to Special Education in the state.

The Council is to report to the General Assembly by February 15 in even-numbered years and January 15 in odd-numbered years.

This annual report reflects Council activity from January 2019 through February 2020. The Council has worked collaboratively with the Bureau of Special Education to address the statutory requirements of the Council.

COUNCIL LEADERSHIP

Thomas Cosker and Shiobon Peng were nominated by unanimous vote, as Council Chairperson and Council Vice Chairperson on February 27, 2018, respectively. Shiobon Peng resigned from the Council on July 11, 2019, after several wonderful years of support and service. Jennifer Lussier was nominated to be the new Vice Chairperson and on September 25, 2019, was approved by the Council by unanimous vote. The State Advisory Council would like to thank these individuals for their leadership throughout this reporting period. The following members were appointed by Mr. Cosker, as chair, to conduct Committee work:

Executive Committee: Chair, Tom Cosker, Vice-Chair, Jennifer Lussier, Bryan Klimkiewicz, SDE Liaison (non-voting), Immediate Past Chair, Siobhan Peng (until resignation, July 2019), Margaret Walsh and John Flanders.

Legislative Committee: Chair, John Flanders, Jennifer Lussier, Jeffrey Spahr (through July 2019), Brian Smith and Joan Nicoll-Senft.

Membership Committee: Chair, Jennifer Lussier, Shelia Crocker, Catherine Summ, Louis Tallarita, Audra Mae Talbot (until July 2019), Mike Nunes and Jonathan Metcalf

Nominating Committee: Chair, Catherine Summ, Jennifer Lussier, Shelia Crocker, Louis Tallarita, Mike Nunes and Jonathan Metcalf.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

The Council, with the support of the Membership Committee, has made tremendous progress with regard to filling Council vacancies. However, it is important to note that 13 members are considered “At-Large members” according to the By-Laws until they receive a legislative appointment letter.

On January 1, 2019, the Council had the following vacancies:

- Parents: 2
- Public School Teacher: 1
- Non-voting members of the General Assembly: 5

On February 1, 2020, the Council has the following vacancies: (Current Membership Status is included as an appendix).

- Non-voting members of the General Assembly: 4

The Membership Committee has completed the following activities:

- Revised/updated the Council member recruitment process.
- Revised/updated the Council Survey for interested and current members to ensure that the Council is representative of the State of Connecticut.
- Revised/updated attendance documentation and monitoring process.
- The SAC currently has Ad Hoc members to assist with the Council work.

COUNCIL ACTIVITY

Full Council Meetings were held on:

- January 30, 2019
- March 27, 2019
- May 22, 2019
- July 10, 2019 (orientation/training)
- September 25, 2019
- November 6, 2019
- January 8, 2020

The Executive Committee reviews Council business and develops the full Council agendas. This committee acts for the Council in all matters requiring decision between full Council meetings.

Executive Committee meetings were held on:

- January 2, 2019
- March 7, 2019
- May 7, 2019
- June 17, 2019
- September 11, 2019
- October 7, 2019
- October 30, 2019
- December 4, 2019
- January 30, 2020

Nominating/Membership Committees prepare an annual slate of officers for the Council and monitor Council attendance and advise the chair on activities related to the process of filling membership vacancies.

Nominating/Membership Committee meetings were held on:

- January 16, 2019
- February 26, 2019
- May 17, 2019
- June 19, 2019
- October 21, 2019
- December 2, 2019

The Legislative Committee reviews proposed legislation and summarizes the information to inform the Council, generates testimony, responds to legislation, and assists the full Council in developing priority areas and communication strategies to widely disseminate these priorities.

Legislative Committee meetings were held on:

- March 1, 2019

Meeting agendas and minutes are posted on the CSDE website on the following link:

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Special-Education/CT-State-Advisory-Council-on-Special-Education/Meeting-Agendas>

FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL

The Council has been authorized by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* since the Act's inception in 1975. The Council is one of 50 “state advisory panels” authorized by the IDEA of 2004 [see regulations in *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*, 34 CFR Section 300.167]. The SAC is also authorized under *Section 10-76i* of the *Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.)*

with the express purpose to "advise the General Assembly, the State Board of Education (SBE) and the Commissioner of Education" on special education matters. The Council is specifically mandated by the IDEA and state statute to accomplish the following duties:

SAC Functional Advisory Areas – per Amendments to *C.G.S. Section 10-76i* (e.g., *P.A. 10-175*) and IDEA State Advisory Panel Duties (34 CFR Section 300.169)

- Advise the CSDE of unmet needs in educating children with disabilities and on the administration of the provisions of sections 10-94f to 10-94k, inclusive.
- Review periodically the laws, regulations, standards, and guidelines pertaining to special education and recommend to the General Assembly, and the State Board of Education any changes which it finds necessary.
- Comment publicly on any new or revised regulations, standards and guidelines proposed for issuance.
- Advise the CSDE in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in Federal monitoring reports under Part B of the Act.
- Advise the CSDE in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.
- Participate with the State Board of Education in the development of any state plan for provision of special education.
- Comment publicly on any procedures necessary for distributing federal funds received pursuant to the Education of the Handicapped Act, 89 Statute 774, 1975, 20 U.S.C. Code § 1400 et seq., as from time to time amended.
- Assist the CSDE in developing and reporting such data and evaluations as may be conducted pursuant to the provisions of said act.
- Report to the General Assembly not later than January fifteenth in the odd-numbered years and not later than February fifteenth in the even-numbered years, concerning recommendation for effecting changes in the special education laws.
- Review Due Process Hearing data and discuss findings and decisions. (34 CFR Section 300.513(d)) and (34 CFR Section 300.514(c)).
- Receive information regarding the provisions of a Free and Appropriate Public Education. Waiver of non-supplant requirement. (34 CFR Section 300.164(c)(4)).
- Advise the CSDE with regard to the determination of risk ratio thresholds above which disproportionality is significant. (34 CFR Section 600.647(b)(iii)(A)).

PROCESS for DETERMINING the “UNMET NEEDS” of STUDENTS with DISABILITIES:

According to *34 CFR Section 300.169*, the SAC’s duties include defining “unmet needs” within the state in the education of children with disabilities.

The Council engaged in the following activities in order to obtain data and information from a variety of stakeholders to assist the Council in determining the “unmet needs”.

- Training/Orientation process.
- Council member input/report from their representative stakeholder group.
 - A structure of information sharing called “Round Table”.
- Reports from the Parent Training Information center, CT Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC).
- Reports from the ConnCASE Representative.
- Reports from adult agency representatives.
- Reports from the Department of Children and Families.
- Reports from the juvenile justice system.
- Reports from the Parent Leadership Training Institute within the Commission on Children.
- Reports from the McKinney-Vento representative.
- Reports from students through:
 - Student membership and the student/youth forums (Leadership Training and Symposium).
- Public comment during meetings.
- State Department of Education presentations and reports.
 - Special Education Division Director presentations, dispute resolution, State Systemic Improvement Plan, IDEA grant, disproportionality/ data disproportionate representation (special education identification and special education disability category) and CT Alternative Assessment System data.

2018-2019 PRIORITIES

The Council has engaged in a series of activities to review existing data, input, and information related to special education. During the orientation/training process, the Council engaged in structured activities with the goal of establishing priorities. Although all topics and issues within special education are important, the Council will focus its’ advisory work on the following established priorities:

Meaningful Inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment

Our task this past year was to research and explore meaningful inclusion for students with IEP’s. The items below reflect proposed ideas and data.

1. Survey Special Education Directors/focus groups – self-reflection on inclusion beyond time with non-disabled peers.
2. Collect parent perspective on inclusion – strengths and weaknesses.
3. Research on effective inclusionary practices being used by other states. (MA)

4. Collect and review data from Indicator 8 parent survey.
5. District mentoring – pair districts utilizing best practices with districts who are struggling with meaningful inclusion.
6. Change language from inclusion – anything that is not inclusion is segregation.
7. National survey results – 1/5 teachers feel prepared to have special education students in their classrooms.
8. Programs vs. individual needs – concept of “if you build it, they will come” mentality in many districts.
9. Revisit dual certification – elementary education and special education combined.

Recommendations

Develop a “road map” to introduce, train and monitor best practices for inclusion at the District level:

1. Develop a strategic state-wide professional development plan for all teachers to learn how to differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all students in Tier 1.
2. Focus groups with successful inclusion models to collaborate with districts that are not providing meaningful inclusion. This would require uniform practices throughout the state of CT.
3. Revisit dual certification with CT training universities and colleges.
4. Due to the enormity of this task possibly start with elementary level.

Mental Health and Special Education Summary

The SAC committee on mental health and special education find the CSDE’s work in facilitating social emotional learning in young children through the issuance of *“The Components of Social, Emotional and Intellectual Habits: Kindergarten through Grade 3”* to be foundational. The use of the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership in meeting the social and emotional needs of children birth to five in early care or education settings demonstrates that supported early care settings sustain children who may otherwise been excluded. The utilization of the Pyramid Model for Promoting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children in Head Start is an important facet early development for children served. This committee also recognizes that some local education agencies are using Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) and the project for Advancing Wellness and Resiliency in Education (AWARE). We applaud the use of such evidenced based practices and given the rise in mental health concerns in students, we believe it is time for state wide implementation and also to reach for the following short and long term goals.

Recommendations

The CSDE should:

Short term

- Work with the Office of Early Childhood and other partners to support the identification and service provision for infants, toddlers and children 3 to 5 who present with mental health concerns.
- Support the statewide implementation of CBITS, AWARE and other evidence based practices such as PBIS and SRBI within a MTSS framework.
- Identification/collaboration with higher education partners to create training modules for school resource officers, contracted transportation, providers, SEPTA and PTOs specific to mental health and emotional behavioral concerns in schools.

Long term

- Coordinate with higher education in the creation of coursework and corollary educator certification guidelines for teachers/pupil personnel/administrators specific to student mental health.
- Create curriculum and/or identify resources in the promotion mental health wellness in schools.

The State Legislature should:

Short term

- Enact legislation to research/study/propose universal assessments and evidence based (for example trauma informed) strategies for mental health wellness in school.

Long term

- Enact legislation raising wages and educational requirements for educators in child caring and early childhood programs.
- Define and influence appropriate funding sources for integrated early childhood and preschool programs.
- Legislate a continuum of supports for mental health services K -12 education.

Parent-School Partnerships Summary

Connecticut has created a definition and framework that says, “Family Engagement is a full, equal and equitable partnership among families, educators and community partners to promote children’s learning from birth through college and career.”

The State Advisory Council for Special Education embraces the principles outlined in the CSDE's *Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families*, and believes that such partnerships are critical to the success of *all* students, *including* those receiving special education services.

Although the Indicator 8 Parent Involvement Survey from the State Performance Plan shows increased reported levels in parent participation satisfaction, the rate of return on these surveys are significantly low. In order to increase stakeholder feedback to inform the council, the CSDE, RESC Alliance and CPAC partnered to hold forums in each RESC region. Through these forums, feedback from district-level Special Education Advisory Councils, and numerous other avenues, it became evident that many families of students with disabilities do not feel like an equal partner in their child's education, with communication being named a significant barrier to full and equal partnerships. We believe that it is imperative to build the capacity of families *and* educators to communicate effectively and build partnerships to maximize student growth.

Recommendations

The CSDE should:

- Add a Chart 6 on *Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships* for "What Does High-Impact Family Engagement Look Like for Students in Special Education?"
- Model the CT Framework and Definition of Family Engagement for LEA's by including parent voice on State-Level Councils, workgroups and task force groups.
- Continue and expand the development of district-level Special Education Advisory Councils to promote a systemic partnership of families, educators and community partners.
- Create a workgroup tasked with improving a higher return rate on the Indicator 8 Survey.
- Integrate specific modules on effective communication and partnership-building within already existing curriculums such as PPT Chair Training, Special Education Leadership Training, and in other relevant areas such as the new Communities of Practice.

The State Legislature should:

- Modify certification requirements for educators and administrators to include a course on effective communication and partnership building with families.
- Consider future legislation to mandate local Special Education Advisory Councils in each district (see Massachusetts existing legislation for example).

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Publications/Full-Equal-and-Equitable-Partnerships-with-Families/Introduction>

Secondary Transition Summary

The State Advisory Council for Special Education is invested in and seeking opportunities to improve quality transition services that appropriately prepare students for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living. The transition services provided should afford students appropriate opportunities to participate in real-life, hands on employment or post-secondary experiences. Opportunities should be individualized to the student in the least restrictive environment and in a competitive employment setting. Students need quality transition services that allow them to fully explore opportunities that are aligned with a student's skill set. There are many students who need individualized evaluations to address their post-secondary education and employment needs. We feel as though there should be increased accountability for schools who do not provide students with quality transition services. This is particularly concerning given the chronic unemployment and underemployment of individuals with disabilities. According to the Bureau of Labor's 2018 data, 19.1% of the disability population was employed. This highlights the importance of addressing the need for improving the transition services that are currently being provided to students.

Recommendations

The CSDE should:

- The Bureau of Special Education (BSE) should provide guidance to school on developing transition plans that are meaningful and individualized to the student, and training should be provided to all PPT members on how to develop transition plans and how to carry them out with fidelity.
- The BSE should work to ensure all schools and districts have high expectations for students' post-secondary outcomes and prioritize general monitoring and supervision activities to emphasize shared accountability for post-secondary results (employment, education, and independent living).
- Support the SAC in strengthening our collaboration with the Transition Task Force so that we can collaboratively work on secondary transition issues.

The State Legislature should:

- Revive legislation to lower the age at which PPTs are required to develop a transition a transition plan and transition services. For all students commencing no later than the date on which the first individual education program takes effect for a child who is at last fourteen years of age (regardless of the primary disability category).

2019-2020 Council Priorities

In September of 2019, The State Advisory Council approved three priority areas to drive 2019-2020 activities. The Council has established working groups to inform the full council in these areas and to develop recommendations for the 2021 report.

The Council established priorities for the 2019-2020 session which include:

- Assistive Technology / Accessible Educational Materials
- Secondary Transition
- Teacher Preparation / Teacher Diversity

Other Priorities:

- Continued focus on the SPP/APR (17 Indicators)
- Revision of the Individualized Education Program document
- Least Restrictive Environment

The SAC would like to encourage members of the public to attend future meetings. The Council is also committed to creativity and improving communication structures to receive information from students, parents, families, educators and all stakeholders who are interested in improving educational experiences for students who require special education.

Respectfully Submitted,



Thomas Cosker, Chair

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State Advisory Council for Special Education

Connecticut State Department of Education

c/o Bryan Klimkiewicz
Special Education Division Director
Bureau of Special Education
Connecticut State Department of Education
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860-713-6910

APPENDIX A

State Advisory Council Membership Composition and Vacancies

	SAC Member	Role	Appointment
1	Sheila Crocker	Parent	Commissioner of Education
2	Audra Mae Talbot	Parent	Commissioner of Education
3	Thomas Cosker	Parent	Commissioner of Education
4	Melvette Hill	Parent	Parent Leadership Training Institute within the Commission on Children
5	Nachi Bhatt	DCF	DCF Commissioner
6	Brian Smith	DDS	DDS Commissioner
7	Louis Tallarita	CSDE	Commissioner of Education
8	Mike Nunes	Corrections	Commissioner of Corrections
9	John Flanders	CPAC	Parent Training Institute
10	Jill Barry	Gen Assembly	Majority Leader of the House of Representatives
11	Allison Kopie	ADS	DORS Commissioner
12	Catherine Summ	ADS	DORS Commissioner
13	Joan Nicoll-Senft	CCSU	Commissioner
14	Kasey Considine	Dis Rights CT	Statute/ OPA
15	Margaret Walsh	ConnCASE	Speaker House of Representatives
16	Patricia Nunez	Judicial Dept.	Judicial Branch
17	Bryan Klimkiewicz	CSDE	Commissioner of Education
*	Jolie Medina	CSDE	CSDE Support for SAC
18	Jeffry Spahr	Parent	Governor
19	Jennifer Lussier	Parent	Governor
20	Jonathan Metcalf	Parent	Governor
21	Alex Steinbrick	Student	SAC Appointment
	At Large Member	Role	Appointment
22	Jake Shumbo	Student	SAC Appointment
23	Cassandra Reilly	Charter	Majority Leader of the House of

			Representatives, letter pending
24	Ana Wittig	CAPSEF	Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, letter pending
25	Kim Williamson	CT SLHA	President Pro-Tempore of the Senate
26	Sonia Taylor-Smith	Parent	Governor letter pending
27	Doris Maldonado	Parent	Governor letter pending
28	Jane Goundrey	Parent	Commissioner letter pending
29	Monica Hatton	Parent	Commissioner letter pending
30	Rick Raucci	Public School Teacher	Majority Leader of the Senate letter pending
31	Tammy Raccio	Parent	Commissioner letter pending
32	Melissa Wrigley	Parent	Commissioner letter pending
33	Gioviana Morales	Parent	Governor letter pending
34	Liz Linehan State Rep House District 103 (Cheshire, Southington, Wallingford)	Gen Assembly	
35	Robin Comey	Gen Assembly	
	Marisa Mascolo Halm		Center for Children's Advocacy
		General Assembly	President Pro Tempore of the Senate
		General Assembly	Minority Leader of the Senate
		General Assembly	Speaker of the House of Representatives
		General Assembly	Minority Leader of the House of Representatives