

GEORGIA  
STATE ADVISORY PANEL  
FOR SPECIAL  
EDUCATION

Annual Report  
September 2016-May 2017

**Chair, Pam Hunter-Dempsey**  
**Vice-chair, Kimberleigh Beard**

## **Introduction**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state establish and maintain an advisory panel for the purpose of advising the state special education staff regarding the education of eligible children with disabilities.

This panel, known as the State Advisory Panel (SAP) for Special Education, is comprised of parents, persons with disabilities, educators and administrators as well as representatives from public and private agencies. The SAP advises the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) Division for Special Education Services and Supports on the unmet needs related to the education of children with disabilities within the State and provides feedback on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding special education. The SAP is a critical partner in the development of Georgia's state Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). The Panel also advises the Division on the improvement activities that need to be developed and implemented in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each year, members review data on the improvement activities included in the SPP and APR and make suggestions for updates to the activities and targets.

## **SAP Overview of 2016-2017**

The SAP met four times this year, three times in Macon Georgia and once in Statesboro Georgia to conduct a site visit of the Disability Resource Center at Georgia Southern University. During the year, presentations were made to the panel by GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies, and organizations.

Topics discussed included:

- ◆ Barriers to graduation for students with disabilities
- ◆ GNETS (Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports)
- ◆ ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act)
- ◆ Project AWARE
- ◆ Georgia Project Apex
- ◆ SSIP (State Systemic Improvement Plan)
- ◆ PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)
- ◆ School-based Mental Health Supports and Services
- ◆ Disproportionality
- ◆ Services and supports available to young children
- ◆ Amending SAP operating procedures
- ◆ Partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
- ◆ Best practices in transition

### **Public Comments**

The receipt and review of public comments by the SAP is an essential duty of the panel. It provides an opportunity for constituents of the state of Georgia to provide feedback on desired educational improvements and to identify practices that are currently working well for students with disabilities.

- ◆ 3 Public comments were reviewed at the December 1-2 meeting and addressed supports available for students with intellectual disabilities and Autism, GAA, SB10 and Specialized Instruction.

- ◆ 14 public comments were reviewed during the February 9-10 meetings and primarily addressed least restrictive environment, dyslexia, mental health, family engagement/communication, transition/school completion, and the need for more IEP personnel.
- ◆ 20 public comments were reviewed at the May 4-5<sup>th</sup> meeting and addressed a need for smaller classroom sizes, 1:1 instruction, more qualified teachers, utilization of assistive technology in the classroom, an increase in diagnostic testing, education of students on disabilities, parent training, creation of a GNETS Advisory Panel and improved implementation of IEP's.

### Committees

Five standing committees met regularly in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. A brief description of each committee follows:

***Dispute Resolution*** – The Dispute Resolution Committee reviews data and decisions related to due process proceedings and other forms of dispute resolution. Upon review of data at each quarterly meeting, committee members make recommendations as well as requests for follow-up to the Division related to their findings.

***Family Engagement*** –The Family Engagement Committee assists in the review of fact sheets for families on initial and annual evaluations, transition from Babies Can't Wait into school, transition out of high school, IEPs, and discipline. The committee also reviews data and information related to parent participation in individualized education program (IEP) meetings and parent response rates on the parent survey. The parent survey is disseminated each year in order to assess the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. This committee makes recommendations for strategies and materials to support increased family engagement.

***Membership***—The Membership Committee assists in the recruitment of new members each year. Committee members review all applications received from potential new

members and make recommendations to the Division and the State Board of Education for new appointments.

**Public Comment**—The Public Comment Committee receives and tracks all public comments submitted to the SAP for review, including those received in writing and in person. Committee members make recommendations for any necessary follow-up and/or response following receipt of each comment.

**Operating Procedures**—The Policies and Procedures Committee reviews and makes recommendations related to the policies, procedures and by-laws that guide the operations of the SAP.

### **Summary of Committee Activities**

As reflected in the May meeting minutes, the SAP recognizes a great need to revisit the utility of its standing committees. This effort was spearheaded by a desire to ensure that the work of the committees remains relevant to the needs of students and current priorities identified by panel members in conjunction with the State Director of the Special Education Division for the Georgia Department of Education. The panel identified several priorities for the 2016-2017 fiscal year. The priorities identified at the September meeting were transition services, mental health supports for students with disabilities, services available to children ages birth-5 and the status of GNETS.

#### ***Operating Procedures:***

- ◆ Addressed gaps in membership and brainstormed strategies to strengthen stakeholder engagement
- ◆ Discussed Panel Membership Attendance at SAP meetings

#### ***Dispute Resolution***

- ◆ The committee reviewed available information on dispute resolution proceedings

#### ***Family Engagement***

- ◆ Discussed the revised parent survey
- ◆ Recommended that the survey be placed on the GaDOE site

### ***Membership***

- ◆ Future vacancies were discussed and potential
- ◆ Discussed recruitment strategies and changes for the application process
- ◆ Application for membership will be posted in both English and Spanish.

### ***Public Comments***

- ◆ Focused on ways to continue to increase the quantity of public comments received

## **SAP Membership**

This year, the SAP membership was comprised 51% of parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The remaining percentage of the SAP included; representatives from the state protection and advocacy agency, the parent training and information center, PART-C, local school administrators, representatives from Title I, and higher education and private schools. In addition, relevant state agencies, including individuals from the Departments of Education, Juvenile Justice, Labor (Vocational Rehabilitation), Corrections, Family and Children Services, and a representative from the Georgia PTA were represented. The Georgia Council for Administrators of Special Education (GCASE) and the Georgia School Superintendents Association (GSSA) were also represented. Members represented a wide array of knowledge, background and opinions. Also, members contributed own real world personal and/or professional experiences to their work on the SAP.

## **Panel Recommendations and Feedback**

This year, the SAP requested that each presenter prepare a set of questions for the panel to answer after their presentations to better facilitate the recommendation process. Throughout the year, the panel's recommendations were centered on family engagement, accessibility of resources and revisions to be made to the panel's by-laws. The panel's recommendations were as follows:

- ◆ Recommended that communication of the continuum of services available for young children be improved within communities.

- ◆ Recommended that the revised Parent Survey be advertised on the GaDOE website
- ◆ Recommended that the public comment form be made available in both English and Spanish on the GaDOE website
- ◆ Recommended for families and young adults to have better access to GVRA services
- ◆ Recommended a continuation of efforts to identify methods to increase public comment at the SAP meetings.

### **SAP Feedback for Board Rules/Plans**

The SAP also provided feedback to the GaDOE on the following topics:

- ◆ The SAP provided feedback for the new GNETS rule
- ◆ The SAP provided feedback for the state ESSA plan
- ◆ The SAP provided preliminary feedback for disproportionality state plan