



# State Advisory Panel For Special Education

Twin Towers East • Suite 1870 • Atlanta, Georgia 30334-5040

Debbie Twiford, Chair  
[debbie\\_e\\_twiford@fc.dekalb.k12.ga.us](mailto:debbie_e_twiford@fc.dekalb.k12.ga.us)

Stephanie Moss, Vice-chair  
[stephanie@parenttoparentofga.org](mailto:stephanie@parenttoparentofga.org)

## Meeting Summary State Advisory Panel Meeting January 22 and 23, 2009 Forsyth, Georgia

**Thursday, January 22, 2009**

Time	Items	
10:10-10:50	Welcome/Panel Member Update	Stephanie Moss opened the meeting and welcomed members. Panel members provided input and comments. One concern expressed was the concern regarding impending cuts in funding for school nurses.
10:50-11:40	GaDOE, Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports	<p>Kim Hartsell provided an update on current initiatives in the Division for Special Education Supports. She reported that the Georgia Project for Assistive Technology have supported seven assistive technology consortia that have been formed around the state this year to build capacity of local systems to provide AT to their students. Many systems are participating in the ATSTAR on-line assistive technology curriculum. The Georgia Instructional Materials Center is completing a census of students who are visually impaired and blind. The Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) Unit is working with two counties, Lee and Emanuel, to implement PBS district-wide. Data from these districts indicate a significant decrease in office discipline referrals. Lee County is producing a video on how to implement PBS. DOE PBS staff are providing four informational forums for systems who are interested in implementing PBS next year. The Professional Learning Unit is working with collaboration coaches around the state to reduce dropout rate and increase graduation rate of students with disabilities. They are facilitating ways to improve attendance and increase achievement.</p> <p>Nancy O'Hara provided an update from the Division for Special Education Services. The GaDOE now has a staff program consultant for Autism, Dr. Alice Murphy. The department also has a new Speech-Language program consultant, Ms. Susan Eckert. System data profiles have been recently updated, except for the assessment data. The Annual Performance Report is due Feb. 2. The Division for Special Education Services is hosting a meeting to discuss best practices for increasing the graduation rate of students with disabilities. Increasing graduation and reducing dropouts are still the two top priority issues for the state.</p>
11:40-12:30	Public Comment Session	<p>Crystal Pritchett proposed promoting best practices in In-School Suspension (ISS). She asserted that many SWD are being placed in Alternative Schools or ISS and that their civil rights are being violated since there is no certified teacher present. She spoke of the fact that many of the students are prevented from learning. Ms. Pritchett stated that best practices related to ISS impact improving school climate and graduation rate. She stated that undiagnosed students are being overlooked, set up for failure, and will likely end up in Alternative School. She said that instructional paraprofessionals get no training whatsoever. She has requested training and help for resources about training for ISS facilitators.</p> <p>Sharon Capers provided concerns about the Gwinnett County Schools' Investing in Educational Excellence Plan. She said that SWD and English Language Learners (ELL students) seem to have been left out of the county's plan. She said that school plans were developed and released to the public in Gwinnett County without any public input. She expressed concerns about the lack of subgroups at the high school level and the expectation that SWD maintain, not improve. She expressed concerns about the message that this plan was sending to the public. She said that there needs to be accountability for all subgroups and that she is not sure how this plans aligns to the Annual Performance Report for special education.</p>

		<p>Jennifer Faulk also spoke about Gwinnett’s plan. She said that she has spoken with GaDOE policy staff and Gwinnett special educators about the plan. She said that only a federal change in AYP law can help. She expressed concerns about accountability for SWD in high school. Regarding Gwinnett’s plan, she advised members to read the application, ask to see data sources and ask about calculations. She also suggested that it would be helpful to identify what schools are being excluded from the application and why. She indicated that alternative schools are excluded.</p> <p>Mary Hollowell addressed the panel with concerns regarding seclusion and solitary confinement. She has written a book, “The Forgotten Room” on the use of seclusion in an alternative school setting. She said that seclusion is traumatizing to both students and teachers. She reported that students with disabilities are often placed in seclusion. Private settings require specially trained professionals (licensed counselors, registered nurses, psychologists) for this, but public schools do not. She stressed the need to hire compassionate teachers and provide training.</p> <p>Peggy Benz spoke to the panel with concerns about Autism. A former teacher, she has worked at several GNETS programs. She stated that children with Autism should not be served in GNETS because it is the most restrictive environment for students with Autism. She said that these students ought to be in public school settings. She expressed concerns about FAPE being provided.</p> <p>Dr. Yolanda Whyte, a pediatrician, spoke to the panel regarding the lack of children’s rights. She said that the United States is one of only 2 nations to refuse to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children. The US ranks 20th out of 21 industrialized nations on child issues, including the lack of baby safety standards.</p> <p>Steve Harbin, a parent of two special needs children with Autism and Asperger’s. asked that the panel consider what the effect of the huge numbers of autistic adults will have on the nation. In Monroe County, needs include staff and space. He said that his family has spent considerable sums of money for help. He believes that children with autism can be successful academically and he has founded the Anchor of Hope, Inc. foundation. He suggested that the panel consider mentor programs and that panel members check the GA Autism Society web site for resources. He stressed the need for parental involvement. He also expressed concerns about students injuring themselves or others.</p> <p>Stephanie Moss read written comment from Teresa Barradine on corporal punishment, from Julie Beam and Betsy Loiacona on restraint and seclusion.</p>
12:35-1:40	<b>LUNCH</b>	
1:40-4:00	State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR)	Dr. Zelfhine Smith-Dixon presented a draft of the state’s Annual Performance Report (APR) and explained group assignments for addressing sections. Panel members were assigned to small workgroups and reviewed each of 20 goals, data and improvement activities in order to make suggestions for changes, additions or deletions.
2:30-2:45	<b>BREAK</b>	
4:00-5:00	2008SPP/APR Small Group Reports and Comments	Each small group reported on recommendations for each of the 20 indicators and submitted them to Dr. Smith-Dixon.
6:00 pm	<b>Dinner on your own</b>	

Friday, January 23, 2009

Time	Items	
8:00-9:20	Committee Meetings	All committees met.
9:20 – 10:15	Committee Reports	<p>Committees reported to full panel on current activities and recommendations:</p> <p><b>Dispute Resolution Committee:</b> Recent issues in due process were reviewed. Number of adjudications was low. Complaint numbers in GA are fairly steady. New rubric for complaints is an improvement. Administrative Law Judge training will be in April. Will give feedback on new brochure on resolution. Discussed possibility of using facilitators at IEP meetings. Parents don't understand the difference between resolution and mediation. Advocates can attend hearings but cannot address the hearing because that would be practicing law.</p> <p><b>Family Engagement Committee:</b> Looked at hits (n=852) on Implementation Manual site. Visitors are only spending an average of 2 minutes on the page. Analyzed possible improvements for manual. Considered 7 chapters, will consult on which three are practical to recommend revisions on. Recommend having a copy of manual in school library so parents can access it; and handing out copies during focus monitoring. Recommend renaming handbook, e.g., "Parent and School manual." Discussed how to have G-CASE be apprised of what SAP is doing. There are 198 entities that produce IEPs. Statewide, 63% of parents attend IEP meetings. Emphasize importance of IEP by creating a Fact Sheet.</p> <p><b>Public Comment Committee:</b> Will recommend addressing issue of training for ISS facilitators. Committee disappointed that Gwinnett County's expectations for SWD were not higher. Regarding increasing numbers of SWD in Alternative schools, recommend inviting Jerry Randolph to present to panel again. Question arose as to what the criteria were for approval for Charter System status. Issue of losing accountability for SWD was discussed. Much discussion of funding and accountability issues. Recommend that a person from disability community be on committee that reviews these Charter System applications. Recommend further discussion of Seclusion and Restraint. Recommend check on local system issue from commenter. Unsure of how to respond to commenter about UN Rights of Children. Issue of corporal punishment was discussed.</p> <p><b>Membership:</b> Recommendations about application for membership on panel. About 12 seats are up for filling/refilling. Application will be posted by Feb. 1, due by April 1. Several parents and state agency representatives who have not attended will be contacted. Will review readability of application.</p>
10:15 – 11:00	Budget Summary and Review	Linda White, Butts County Superintendent, reviewed current and projected budget shortfall issues, subject to change by the General Assembly.
11:15 -12:50	Presentation: The GAA in the Classroom	Four teachers and 2 parents reported on the GAA and access to the curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Much acclaim and need for differentiation were expressed by panel members.
12:50 – 1:15	Lunch	
1:15 – 2:00	<p>Update on OSEP Verification Visit</p> <p>New Federal Regulations Released 12-01-08</p> <p>Follow-up on Restraint and Seclusion Guidelines</p>	<p>Nancy O'Hara shared the report from the federal verification visit and discussed the required improvement activities.</p> <p>Nancy explained the new federal regulations (parent revocation of consent; parents representing themselves in due process hearings) and talked about tentative plans for future rule development.</p> <p>Kim Hartsell explained the distribution of the guidance document and next steps that have been identified. She stated that the Panel has provided input into the guidelines, but has not been asked to endorse or approve the guidelines. Panel members were given the opportunity to comment. There was recognition of the need for training on positive behavior support. The GA Advocacy Office has published a report on abusive restraint and seclusion and advocates a blanket prohibition with very limited exceptions.</p>
2:00 – 2:30	Planning for May 7-8 Meeting	Suggestions for "Southwest Georgia" location: Columbus, Americus, Valdosta, Callaway Gardens, Lake Blackshear.