



Georgia State Advisory
Panel for Special Education

Annual Report
2018-2019

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Introduction

The Individual 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 the 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 the APR and make suggestions for updates to the appropriate activities and targets.

SAP Membership

The SAP maintained the regulatory requirement of a minimum of 51% of the Panel being parents of students with disabilities and/or individuals with disabilities. The membership included 30 parents of students with disabilities, two individuals with a disabilities, representatives from state and protection advocacy agencies.

16 appointed agency representatives. 2018-2019 Agency Representatives included:

Georgia Department of Education, Charter Schools
Georgia Department of Education, Special Education
Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
Georgia Department of Corrections
Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice
Georgia Department of Family and Children Services
Georgia Babies Can't Wait
Institute of Higher Education, Special Education
Georgia Advocacy Office
Georgia Network for Education and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS)
Georgia Superintendents' Association (GSSA)
Parent to Parent of Georgia
Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education (GCASE)
Georgia Department of Education, Federal Programs

Members represented a diversity of knowledge, background and opinions and brought their own real life personal and professional experiences to their work on the SAP.

SAP Overview

The SAP met four times this year in Macon, Georgia. During the year, presentations were made to the committee by members of the GaDOE staff as well as other individuals, agencies and organizations.

Topics included:

- Georgia's System of Continuous Improvement
- Family Engagement and Dispute Resolution data and trends
- Partnerships with Parent to Parent
- GaDOE Special Education Help Desk
- The IEP Facilitation Project
- Compliance Indicators
- Early Childhood Transitions
- Post-Secondary Goals for Transition
- Students with Disabilities Dropout Rates
- Georgia State Systemic Improvement Plan
- Georgia Alternate Assessment 2.0
- Implementation of New Regulations regarding Disproportionality
- Understanding the 504 Process
- Technical Assistance for support of local districts about General Supervision and IDEA Implementation

Public Comments

Public Comments were heard at each meeting held by SAP allowing member the opportunity to hear from constituents around the state. Public comments related to:

- Need for better understanding of student's disability
- Need more money, personnel and training to provide necessary services
- Need to challenge our students
- Need to develop better Individualized Education Plan
- Need to provide more training for case managers
- Need more training for paraprofessionals
- Need more assistance with remedial reading
- Focus on students' needs not labels

Committees

Five standing committees met regularly in conjunction with each quarterly meeting of the full panel. Committees included:

- Dispute Resolution
- Family Engagement
- Membership
- Public Comment
- Operating Procedures

Panel Members discussed the state Annual Performance Indicators, IDEA State Determinations, how to improve engagement of SAP members, marketing needs for public comment and panel, and marketing needs for the FY19 SAP Application.

SAP member voted for FY19 Sub-committees for the following area:

- Best Practices
- Family Engagement
- Inter-Agency Collaboration
- Flexibility and Accountability
- Dispute Resolution
- Public Comment
- Marketing

In addition to previously identified GaDOE priorities, the small group discussion of panel members of Priority Activities reflected:

- Need for procedural safeguards
- Eligibility Determination
- IEP Development and Implementation
- Post-Secondary Transition
- Mental health Awareness and Supports
- Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Panel Recommendations

- Ensure that higher education aligns the framework for preparation programs
- Provide easier access to services for families on RTI
- Development of District training on parental safeguards

Summary of Public Comments

Public Comments were heard at each meeting held by SAP allowing panel members an opportunity to hear from constituents from around the state.

81 public comments were received in FY19 reflecting the following concerns related to services for students in Georgia.

- Need for better understanding of student's disability
- Need more money, personnel and training to provide necessary services
- Need to challenge our students
- Need to develop better Individualized Education Programs
- Need to provide more training for case managers
- Need for more training of paraprofessionals
- Need for more assistance with remedial reading
- Focus on students' needs not labels

Specific responses to the SAP Public Comment form revealed the following consensus:

Question 3: Services for students with disabilities can be improved by:

Training for staff (teachers, paras, admin)

Increase funding (salaries, to reduce class size, programs, resources)

Accountability (IEP implementation monitoring)

Question 4: One great thing that seems to work well for students is:

Parents who advocate for their children

Caring staff [at schools]

Question 5: If I could change one thing for students with disabilities in public schools it would be:

Increase opportunities for inclusion

Increase or improve accessibility to resources for students

Increase and or improve communication (parents and staff).