



West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children

ANNUAL REPORT
School Year | 2022-2023

Preface

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) requires each state to have an Advisory Panel. The West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (WVACEEC) is also mandated by State Code 18-20-6. The Council is charged in part with advising decision makers regarding the unmet needs of exceptional children. The mission adopted by the Council is to influence the State Board of Education, public policy makers, and West Virginia's citizens in ways that continuously improve educational outcomes for children with exceptionalities.

The Council is composed of members appointed by the State Superintendent of Schools.

Council Members

Jacob Green, Chair
Melanie Hesse, Chair
Brenda Lamkin
Cara Price
Deb Lockwood
Ashley Orndorff

Happy Plaugher
Samantha Ribeiro-Matos
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COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The Advisory Council plans and initiates a variety of activities to meet its charge and achieve its mission.

The Council:

- schedules and conducts regional meetings across the state to seek input and gain information about programs and services for exceptional students.
- informs local media, local and regional special education administrators, Parent Educator Resource Centers, principals, superintendents, and community members about scheduled meetings.
- provides a forum for programs to be showcased and issues to be identified.
- develops and shares information and the Annual Report of recommendations with the State Board of Education, schools, and members of the public.
- reviews and comments on proposed policies, regulations and procedures affecting children with exceptionalities.
- provides a part-time staff to ensure access to the Council.
- provides practical information to parents on how to deal with concerns.
- participates in meetings with other groups associated with providing special education services.
- serves as a stakeholder group for the development of the State Performance Plan and the Annual Performance Report, both required by federal law.
- cooperates and collaborates with the West Virginia Department of Education/Office of Special Education (OSE) and other public and private agencies to address the unmet needs of students with exceptionalities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although the Council is charged with identifying the unmet needs of children with exceptionalities, it is important to recognize that there are many parents, families, educators, and other agencies working together to ensure access to the benefits of public education. Examples include, but are by no means limited to:

PARENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

We offer our deepest gratitude to all parents, families, and community members who continue to support and improve services for every student. Your dedication makes a meaningful difference. We also extend special thanks to the community members who shared their feedback and ideas during the Council's public meetings this year.

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

We sincerely appreciate the local school districts for their commitment to improving services for all students. We value their responsiveness to feedback and their willingness to engage in open dialogue that strengthens our shared work. We also extend our thanks to the districts that hosted Council meetings and provided spaces for productive discussion. Their partnership and support help ensure that every student's needs remain at the center of our efforts.

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Council recognizes the importance of continued teacher training based on evidence-based practices. We commend the Office of Special Education for its strong partnerships with state, regional, and national technical assistance centers. The Council also acknowledges the efforts of the special education office for supporting districts through a multi-tiered approach that includes universal, targeted, and intensive supports.

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Council applauds the West Virginia State Board of Education for its leadership in setting strategic goals for school improvement and for developing policy structure and accountability measures necessary to achieve them. Such leadership, coupled with policy oversight and ongoing professional development, has provided many new opportunities to improve achievement for all students.

Meeting Dates	Topics/Districts
August 31, 2022	Virtual – council only
September 24, 2022	Virtual – council only SPP/APR Review
October 13 and 14, 2022	Mercer, Summers, Wyoming, McDowell
November 17 and 18, 2022	Upshur, Lewis, Barbour
December 2022	No meeting
January 12, 2023	Virtual – council only Policy 2419 Review
February 9, 2023	Virtual- council only By-Laws Updates
March 2 and 3, 2023	Jackson, Roane, Wirt, Calhoun
April 27 and 28, 2023	Braxton, Nicholas

For information about these meetings or to obtain a copy of the minutes, please email Dawn Embrey-King, Executive Director (dembreyking@k12.wv.us)

UNMET NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Council Takeaways obtained through district presentations, public comments, and JotForm submissions, the WVACEEC has identified the unmet needs and makes the following recommendations to the WVDE/WVSBOE:

1. Behavioral needs were identified by most every district as a major challenge.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) and Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) are both exemplary programs that have been utilized and supported by the WVDE and should continue to be recommended and utilized.

The goal of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is to make schools effective and efficient and provide equitable learning environments for all students. Decreasing aggressive conduct and bullying can occur through improving culture and climate, building relationships with students and staff, changing academic outcomes, and increasing prosocial behaviors. <https://tinyurl.com/ycysphcu>

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) is designed to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent who is experiencing a mental health or addictions challenges or is in crisis. YMHFA is primarily designed for adults who regularly interact with young

people. The YMHFA course introduces common mental health challenges for youth, review typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help you people in both crisis and non-crisis situations. <https://tinyurl.com/s8497yu2> . The West Virginia Tiered System of Support (WVTSS) is a framework that suggests flexible use of resources to provide academic, behavioral, and mental health support to enhance learning for all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Council recommends a statewide emphasis on positive behavior and mental health support for students.
 - The Council recommends that the WVDE provide training and support on how to meet behavioral and/or mental health concerns of students with exceptionalities. It is recommended that training be provided on writing and implementing effective IEPs that address appropriate behaviors or replacement behaviors and that instruction of appropriate behavior be provided.
2. The need for *Specially Designed Instruction* (SDI) is an essential criterion for a special education placement.

The need for special instruction must be paired with actual instruction that is designed to meet the unique needs of learners. For example, SDI is not provided by a computer program utilized as an intervention in a special education classroom.

SDI is defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as “adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction— To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum...”

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Council recommends that the WVDE provide support and resources to the districts on what Specially Designed Instruction is and how it is provided to students with IEPs to ensure access to the general curriculum.
3. Kinship and Foster care of students with disabilities continues to be on the rise.

Despite the availability of information, best practices, and recommendations on adequately fostering a child with special needs, it is still possible that the process will fail. Even families with the best intentions for the foster child can experience disruptions. Foster parents who cannot gauge their capacity to care for a child with special needs may also find themselves having a difficult situation later. This not only includes financial difficulty but also mental, emotional, and physical difficulties. Overall, the goal of fostering and possibly adopting a child with special needs is not just to give them a new home, but to provide them with a loving, long-term family who will provide for the child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. School systems also struggle with educating students in the foster care system. Special attention and deliberate support should be provided to ensure that both the student and the foster family's needs are met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Council recommends that the WVDE provide support and resources to families who are fostering students with special needs.
- The Council recognizes how transient foster children can be, but recommends that a plan be developed that would move with the student so that services and support can continue.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the chairperson,

Dawn Embrey-King

Executive Director, WVACEEC