



# West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children

ANNUAL REPORT  
School Year | 2023-2024

## **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**

Ashley Orndorff, Co- Chair

Erica Sauer, Co-Chair

Trina Clark

Kelly Crow

Jacob Green

Rhonda Hayes

Rachel Hatfield

Melanie Hesse

Deb Lockwood

Happy Plaugher

Cara Price

Samantha Ribeiro-Matos

Katie Veazey-Keener

Sheila Paitsel, Non-voting WVDE liaison to the WVACEEC

## **Council Staff**

Dawn Embrey-King, Executive Director

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The activities of the West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children are supported and funded by a Federal grant from the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education.

## **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 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 (SPP/APR), 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 Board of Education for demonstrating leadership in setting strategic goals for school improvement. Their development of clear policies and accountability measures helps schools make real progress. This leadership, along with ongoing professional development and guidance, has opened new opportunities to enhance achievement for all students

Meeting Dates	Districts Represented
September 22, 2023	Council members only
October 12 – 13, 2023	Hampshire, Mineral
November 8 – 9, 2023	Cabell, Putnam
February 2024	Resource Fair (Virtual)
March 14 – 15, 2024	Marion, Monongalia
April 18 – 19, 2024	Berkeley, Jefferson, Morgan
June 2024	Council members only

For information about these meetings or to obtain a copy of the minutes, please email Dawn Embrey-King, Executive Director ([dembreyking@k12.wv.us](mailto: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. There is a critical need for qualified special education teachers in WV.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- WVDE continue to expand the **Grow your Own** Pathway to Teaching Program
  - funding be provided to create a specific cohort of special educators
2. Parents and families that the council heard from do not feel heard, or feel that their input is valued regarding their children’s education.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- training opportunities be provided to IEP Team members including administrators who often chair the IEP Team meetings.
  - The **Facilitated IEP** training model would be a beneficial type of training for any teacher, service provider and administrator that participates in IEP Team meetings.
3. There are a high number of students in special education in the foster care system.

*The WVACEEC recognizes the need to support students, foster parents and schools. Special education adds another layer of communication and service delivery hurdles.*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- WVDE continues to expand the work of the WV Schools of Diversion and Transition **Education Recovery Specialists**.
- the Office of Federal Programs/Special Education collaborate with the WV Schools of Diversion in Transition to institute a stronger communication system with the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), county attendance directors, and foster agencies to better support students with disabilities in foster care

4. Transition needs of students with disabilities are not being met.

*Based on data from the Office of Special Education (as noted in the SPP/APR) Project SEARCH could be expanded across WV. Currently, 4 counties in WV participate in Project Search. The council recommends that the WVDE Office of Special Education utilize Project Search at WVU Medicine/Ruby Memorial Hospital as a model of job training and employment opportunities for students with disabilities.*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Project SEARCH be promoted at conferences and special education director's meetings and calls.
- Project SEARCH be included as a transition option in the Office of Special Education's Guidepost to Graduation pathway to post school outcomes.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the chairperson,

***Dawn Embrey-King***  
Executive Director, WVACEEC