**2019 - 2020**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

***of the***

**West Virginia**

**Advisory Council**

**for the**

**Education of**

**Exceptional Children**



**July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020**

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, 2018-2019**

Melanie Hesse Romney, WV (Hampshire) Schools for the Deaf and the Blind

Jacob Green Madison, WV (Boone) Parent, Office of Diversion/Transition

Brenda Lamkin Buckhannon, WV (Upshur) Parent, WVPTI

Erica Sauer Weirton, WV (Hancock) Special Education Administrator

Rhonda Stout Maxwelton, WV (Greenbrier) Parent, Teacher, Behavior Specialist

Susan Beck Charleston, WV (Kanawha) State Agency Representative

Rebecca Derenge Charleston, WV (Kanawha) McKinney-Vento (HEARTH Act)

Gwen Bryant St. Albans, WV Parent, DHHR Newborn Hearing Dir.

Emily Robinson Grantsville, WV Individual with a Disability

Patricia Sheuvront Salem, WV Parent

Debbie Lockwood Barboursville, WV (Cabell) Marshall University

Melanie Britton West Union, WV (Doddridge) Parent, PERC

Deidra Darst Kenna, WV (Jackson) Parent, Speech/Language Pathologist

# Council Staff

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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 in order 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, school board members, school improvement councils, faculty senates 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, Legislature, 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.
* participates in related special education activities.
* assigns members to various state committees and task forces.
* 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 Office of Special Education (OSE) of the West Virginia Department of Education and other public and private agencies to address the unmet needs of students with exceptionalities.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**2019-2020**

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**

Enormous gratitude is extended to all the parents, families and community members committed to support and improve services for all students. Special thanks are due to all those community members who provided testimony at Council’s public hearings this year.

The Council admires the work of WV Parent Training & Information Inc. in its work with families of children and youth with disabilities through training, information and technical assistance. The Council is fortunate to have the PTI director working with us to improve collaboration and share information with parents. Parent Educator Resource Centers in some counties provide additional support and assistance in understanding special education programs and obligations. PERCs are also represented on the Council. Resources and activities for PERCs and parents are supported by Nancy Cline state coordinator for Family Engagement.

This year, the Institutions of Higher Education are represented by Marshall University. MU is crucial for continuing teacher preparation, continuing education and certification programs in addition to specialized grants that support training for personnel in the areas of vision, hearing and mental health. The Autism Training Center at Marshall supports families and provides support to teachers who work with high needs children. The Positive Behavior Intervention Support team at Marshall is essential for promoting mental and behavioral health in schools. Also located at Marshall is the Mental Health First Aid program and Handle with Care training. An additional training program has been grant funded to address Trauma Informed Mindfulness Engagement for Kids (TIME4 Kids). The Council is confident that this professional training project will evolve into a significant support system for all teachers and support personnel.

Two community organizations have contributed additional resources to promote understanding and information for students and families through advocacy and legal services of West Virginia Disability Rights. Sojourners of the Kanawha Valley provided the Council with insights about the plight of children and individuals living without regular and adequate shelter.

**County School Districts**

Of the eleven school systems represented this year, all should be commended for their efforts to increase the level of student achievement and increase the graduation rate for students. Noteworthy efforts include extensive professional development opportunities, interagency collaboration, specialized training for new special education teachers, monthly support groups, computer/technology assisted instruction and enhanced collaboration with institutions of higher education. These are widespread efforts to improve teachers’ capacity to address the needs of all students and require dedication and persistence to maintain these initiatives year after year.

Districts articulated many innovative and creative methods used to overcome barriers that inhibit the effective provision of services to students with disabilities. While noting that compliance is essential for accountability, districts continue to engage in activities that promote “results driven accountability” and continue to partner with external agencies for the benefit of transient and transitional students. All of these efforts strengthen the capacity of school systems to provide a free appropriate public education to exceptional students in West Virginia.

The Council would like to commend all of the districts visited for their attention to two significant concerns. First, each county is focused on guaranteeing that all students are taught by qualified teachers and well-trained staff. Secondly, interagency networks are evolving to support students with emotional and social challenges through school and community based mental health clinics, parent support groups and other community enterprises. Although the success rate of students with emotional problems caused by chemical or environmental circumstances is less than optimum, all districts are open to collaboration with other agencies to break the cycle of this national epidemic.

***As of this writing and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools throughout West Virginia have had to resort to creative remote instructional strategies. This has been an extremely large learning curve for teachers, parents and children. The Council applauds the effort and dedication exhibited by everyone who has accepted this challenge with determination to meet the needs of all children in West Virginia.***

**West Virginia Department of Education**

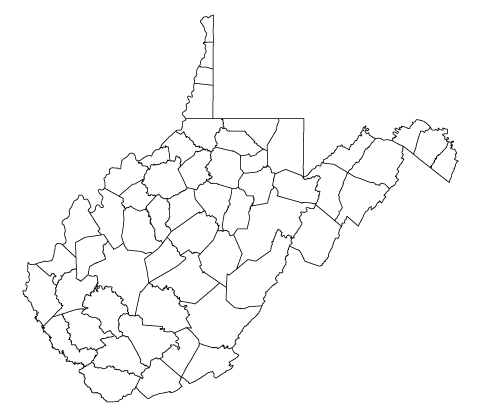
The Office of Special Education and Student Support is to be commended for fostering partnerships with state, regional and national technical assistance centers. Collaboration with the Autism Training Center specifically addresses concerns about positive school climate, through Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The Council supports the on-going need for teacher training related to research-based strategies through summer academies, and teacher boot camps. ReClaim WV: Connecting Social-Emotional and Mental Health Supports to the Opioid Epidemic demonstrates another inter-departmental and inter-agency commitment of the Department.

The Council has the privilege and obligation of serving as a stakeholder group for the Office of Special Education and Student Support State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR), both required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). The Council was pleased to submit letters of support in pursuit of funding for the Families Engagement Grant, continuation of Parent Training and Information, Inc, and letters of support for development of targeted mental health training curricula for professionals working in the field.

**State Board of Education**

The Council applauds the West Virginia 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. Special appreciation is extended to the State Board and the WV Department of Education for keeping the public apprised of intent and plans to address the COVID-19 crisis and to keep our children safe. The forward-thinking leaders of the Department of Education, State Board and Governor’s office have proven successful for West Virginia citizens.

**Meeting Sites 2019-2020**



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| **September 19-20, 2019** | **Cabell, Wayne, Lincoln Counties** |
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| **October 17-18, 2019** | **Randolph & Upshur Counties** |
|  |  |
| **November 21-22, 2019** | **Fayette & Raleigh Counties** |
|  |  |
| **December 12-13, 2019** | **Tyler, Pleasants & Wetzel Counties** |
|  |  |
| **February 6-7, 2020** | **Greenbrier County & Davis Stuart School** |
|  |  |
| **April 10, 2020** | **Virtual meeting via MS Teams OSESS** |
|  |  |
| **May 4, 2020** | **Annual Work Session, Virtual meeting WVSDB** |

**All meetings are open to the public for comments and reports are provided by state and district staff. Additionally, speakers are invited to address topics of concern and interest.**

# PERVASIVE ISSUES, CONCERNS and RECOMMENDATIONS

# LONGSTANDING CONCERNS

Throughout the year, the Council listens to comments from school personnel and parents about their challenges and accomplishments. The diversity of culture, terrain, and local opportunity is vast for our small state, but there are universal areas of concern which are consistently discussed as the Council travels to all regions of West Virginia. Throughout this school year the concerns echoed the same issues as the past several years. During the fall and winter, the recurring theme was the effect of the opioid crisis on families, especially those with young children and the need for recruitment and retention of highly skilled teachers. There were concerns about the organizational structure of many schools, the need for a full continuum of services, and personnel to provide specialized services like behavior analysis, speech therapy, educational interpreters and other related service providers. Then in March 2020, the world experienced the COVID-19 challenge, exceeding all imagination since World War II. The response was global, but the impact on families varied with economic and cultural circumstances. Teachers, doctors, front line service providers, literally everyone was called upon to bring their best effort, skill, and thinking power to bear on this pandemic. So far, West Virginia has fared better than many states. The incidence of the virus has been lower; screening, social distancing and stay-at-home measures have been successful. However, the one big problem that quickly became evident was the need for improved technology and broadband access to technology. Additionally, teachers have been challenged to quickly adapt to remote teaching strategies. Parents have been challenged to keep children engaged in learning and students have been challenged to adjust their learning styles. Yes, the challenges have been many and will continue to evolve as our communities begin to re-open without triggering another outbreak of the virus. The Council is obligated to identify the issues that will impact students with exceptionalities. For that reason, we offer the following observations and recommendations.

***Personnel Recruitment, Retention, Professional Learning & Support***

Nationally, one of the longest standing concerns for districts, has been the discrepancy between student achievement, performance and successful completion of grade level standards in preparation for transition to adult independence. Regardless of improvement in methodology and differentiation for unique student learning needs, results on standardized assessments are still insufficient to close the achievement gap. This concern raises the complex questions of teacher **preparation, specialization and continuing support**.

In the 2018-19 Annual Report, the Council addressed the issue of teacher preparation from the pre-service to certification. Bold efforts have been made at some universities to address the recruitment shortage and districts often provide financial support through tuition reimbursement upon completion of a program. Yet there remain critical shortages of highly skilled and specialized personnel. Marshall University has addressed the need for behavior specialists through grant funding and the Office of Special Education and Student Support has supported graduate programs for speech therapists at WVU and MU. Still there are not enough specialists to meet the growing and intense needs of students across the state. A partial solution would be to extend the ability of retired teachers to work beyond 140 days without reduction to their retirement benefits. This would allow districts to provide continuing professional learning opportunities for teachers without imposing on their non-contract time. This approach would ensure that the right teachers get the appropriate training and support. In the time of teacher shortages, retired certified teachers could fill the gap while recruitment efforts continue.

As the complexity and intensive needs of students increases, districts need more specialists, not fewer, to provide individualized, personalized adaptations to instructional pedagogy. The school aid funding formula needs to be adjusted for additional personnel. Classroom teachers often need consultations and demonstrations from specialists and those specialists need compensation beyond the teacher salary scale. For example, a speech therapist working in a nursing home is paid based on years of experience, but if that same individual later decides to work in a school district, the salary is based on experience in the education system without credit for community work. Districts often are forced to contract with specialists from the private sector to meet the related service needs of highly involved students. These professionals fall into the following categories: Board Certified Behavior Analysists, Registered Behavior Technicians, Speech Language Therapists, Occupational and Physical Therapists, Braille Specialists, and Educational Interpreters. Contracts based on hourly rates are often exorbitant but must be paid to provide students with appropriate services.

Districts also expressed need for licensed social workers to assist with home/school liaison, transition, and community supports. This dilemma seems comparable to the shortage of school nurses and relates to funding, formula, and State certification classifications. Thus, arises the question of incentive for teachers and aides to undertake this intensive training. Once again the challenge of providing local support for teachers is stymied by policy which limits the number of non-instructional staff that a district can support to provide guidance, coaching, mentoring and training in an efficient and effective way that maximizes quality differentiated instruction to all students.

***For these reasons, the Council recommends that the West Virginia Department of Education use every means available to secure additional funding for teacher preparation and expand salary classifications to encourage and promote quality instructional programming with added flexibility for teacher scheduling and terms of employment. Support specialists and certified special education classroom teachers should be offered a monetary incentive for additional graduate work with the obligation that they will reciprocate by remaining in the employ of the district which supported the additional training.***

***Technology and Instructional Design***

One very significant outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic and school closures has been the acknowledgement of the essential need for improved access to broadband and internet service throughout West Virginia. Wikipedia offers the following explanation of how telecommunications are changing world-wide.

In [telecommunications](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telecommunications), **5G** is the fifth generation technology standard for cellular networks, which [cellular phone companies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_network_operator) began deploying worldwide in 2019, the planned successor to the [4G](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4G) networks which provide connectivity to most current [cellphones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cellphone).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5G#cite_note-Looper-1) Like its predecessors, 5G networks are [cellular networks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cellular_network), in which the service area is divided into small geographical areas called *cells*. All 5G wireless devices in a cell are connected to the [Internet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet) and [telephone network](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telephone_network) by [radio waves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_wave) through a local [antenna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antenna_(radio)) in the cell. The main advantage of the new networks is that they will have greater [bandwidth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bandwidth_(signal_processing)), giving higher [download speeds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Download_speed),[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5G#cite_note-Looper-1) eventually up to 10 [gigabits per second](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gigabits_per_second) (Gbit/s).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5G#cite_note-Hoffman-2) Due to the increased bandwidth, it is expected that the new networks will not just serve cellphones like existing cellular networks, but also be used as general [internet service providers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_service_provider) for laptops and desktop computers, competing with existing ISPs such as [cable internet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cable_internet)….

The on-going crisis has provided a systemic evaluation of the statewide digital divide effecting learning, technology access and instructional implementation. Many teachers were not ready to switch to an entirely new methodology, but we must give credit due to the hundreds of teachers who put students first and learned how to use the available resources. For some the learning curve was steep, as it was for students living in dead zones where there is no access to cell or internet service. From McDowell to Hancock County and beyond, the significance of access to the internet has never been stronger.

Technology alone will not solve the dilemma of student literacy, achievement, and transition to post-secondary endeavors. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES):

21% of adults in the United States fall into the illiterate/functionally illiterate category. Nearly two-thirds of fourth graders read below grade level, and the same number graduate from high school still reading below grade level. This puts the U.S. well behind several other countries in the world, including Japan, all the Scandinavian countries, Canada, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom.

The NCES expands the literacy statistics further: 35% are white, 34% Hispanic, 23% African American, and 8% other. New Hampshire, Minnesota and North Dakota have the highest literacy rates (avg. 94%), while Florida, New York and California have the lowest (avg. 78%).

The latest available proficiency data from the State Performance Plan (SPP) for FFY 2017 reflects a slight decrease (0.83%) in proficiency in English Language and a slight increase (0.40%) in mathematics from the target objectives. This data reflects the initial implementation year of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Statewide proficiency in English is 12.79% and 11.30% in mathematics for students with disabilities.

Literacy and technology are daunting issues facing policy makers, educators and communities across West Virginia and the nation. The adverse consequences that can ripple down affect everything from employment to health care. Solving these crises will require creative collaboration among all stakeholders. Libraries, schools, churches and shelters have a crucial role to play.

Ms. Margaret Taylor, YWCA of Charleston, Executive Director of Sojourners shelter addressed the Council and described a collaborative project and summer initiative the shelter has with Books-A-Million and Kanawha Co. Libraries. Children are regularly taken to the library and once a summer to Books-A-Million to select 5 books for their very own to take home. She described the excitement and looks on the children’s faces when they get to leave with their very own “purchase”. This is an example of the true spirit of community/family engagement.

Literacy is driven by the “instructional” design of the curriculum, materials, and resources available to classroom teachers which results in the “learning” experience. The University of Michigan describes instructional design as “the process of analysis of learning needs and goals and the development of a delivery system to meet those needs”. If this sounds a lot like an Individual Education Plan, that is precisely what it is – specifically designed instruction to meet the needs of exceptional students. A company called Six Red Marbles ([www.sixredmarbles.com](http://www.sixredmarbles.com)) calls this “compelling student centered instructional design”.

Educational technology and pedagogy are constantly changing as we have learned in the last three months of the 2019-2020 school year. One thing never changes: the need for high quality teachers and essential resources to carry on their mission to address the needs of all children.

***For these reasons, the Council recommends that the West Virginia Department of Education and State Board of Education continue to exert pressure on Legislative and community interests to ensure that all students and residents of West Virginia have access to 21st Century technology that will accommodate traditional, online and hybrid learning and instruction of grade level content and standards. Furthermore, the Council recommends that all teachers in West Virginia are provided with adequate training and support to provide the instructional methodologies cited above.***

***Free Appropriate Public Education, Least Restrictive Environment and Continuum of Services***

The final recommendation of the Council stems from the original intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which can be summarized as “Free Appropriate Public Education” for all students. In 2018-19, at least 63% of students with disabilities were receiving services in general education setting 80% or more of the school day and fewer than 9% of students with disabilities were receiving services in special education settings between 60% and 100% of the school day. This data is a good indicator that students with disabilities are included in general education classes with their peers. Here in lies the conundrum, students must receive access to the general education curriculum while receiving specialized instruction to address their learning needs, both academic and social. This often results in general and special education teachers working together in the same classroom, a model called co-teaching. Theoretically, this model would seem to address both issues of curriculum and specialized instruction. However, co-teaching poses additional problems, like mutual planning time and teacher role expectations. Those challenges can be overcome with professional learning and leadership. The greater problem seems to be how to implement co-teaching and resource room instruction for students given the current limitations on IDEA funding and the school aid formula for personnel. To implement effective co-teaching and pull-out resource room instruction, more personnel are needed.

Throughout the past year, the Council heard a number of concerns about a lack of the continuum of services. Three of those parents are cited below:

* One parent expressed concern that the IEP teams for her two boys did not adequately address their cognitive and social emotional needs. She told a story about her 13 year old who is the size of a 3rd grader and how children at the middle school put him up to making inappropriate comments to a female student. Her sons need additional support and supervision to learn social behaviors. This is her direct quote. “Here is the point I want to make tonight, my children and others like them don’t fit what’s defined as “normal’. And the problem is, despite having a documented history of mental illness and special needs requiring intervention, society in general expects this population of people to conform to social norms. We know they think differently, process information and environments differently, yet we expect them to function independently and **act** as if they don’t. “
* Another parent discussed her concern over multi-categorical classrooms. “One teacher in my child’s school serves Kindergarten thru 5th grade. At any given time she has different grades in there at the same time. Next year she will have a 1st grader most of the day. How will that student receive what he needs, while the teacher is also working with two 5th graders, a 3rd grader and a 2nd grader. I know, as a parent to a small kindergarten aged child, I would not want my 6 year old in there with 5th graders. This room also serves as the in school suspension room. At another school the “high functioning autism room” is also the “BD” room.
* It often seems that when the IEP team gets to the Least Restrictive Environment placement, they just whiz over the decision.

Throughout State Board Policy 2419 there are references, criteria and obligations for the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

* Eligible students must be educated with general education students in the general education classroom to the maximum extent **appropriate**.
* In the determination of an **appropriate** placement in the LRE, the IEP team begins with the general education environment with supplementary aids and services. If the student’s IEP cannot be implemented in that environment with an expectation of reasonable progress on and achievement of IEP goals, a placement on the **continuum** of placement options providing less education with students without disabilities may be considered.
* The continuum of placement options includes:
  + General Education: Full Time – 80% or more of the school day.
  + General Education: Part-Time – 79% of the school day or less.
  + Special Education: Separate Class – less than 40% of the school day in general ed.
  + Special Education: Special School – 50% or more of the school day in public or private separate day school facilities.
  + Special Education: Out-of-School Environment – specially designed instruction and related services are delivered in a non-school environment (library, group home), medical treatment facility/hospital or home.
  + Special Education: Residential Facility – 24 hour care and supervision.
  + Special Education: Parentally-placed in Private School
  + Special Education: Correctional Facilities.

Although the majority of students with mild disabilities will function well and continue to make academic progress, there are students who need specific individualization. In the attempt to integrate students with their peers, some are being left behind and their needs are unmet.

***For these reasons, the Council recommends that the West Virginia Department of Education and Office of Special Education and Support Services examine ways and means for all districts to be able to provide a full continuum of services for students with disabilities.***

# PARTICIPANTS

The Advisory Council would like to express our gratitude to the following people who attended meetings across the State during the past year. Some provided information, some expressed concerns and other gave presentation for the Council to acquire in-depth information on topics of interest and concern. We are happy to acknowledge the Pro Start students who provided refreshments.

| **Name** | **Position** | **City** | **State** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **September 2019** |  |  |  |
| Heather Scarberry | Dir. Of Special Education | Huntington | WV |
| Kelly Watts | Assistant Superintendent | Huntington | WV |
| Crystal Kendall | Parent | Grantsville | WV |
| Cynthia Arrowood | Sp Ed Teacher | Huntington | WV |
| Allison Rae Davis | Parent | Huntington | WV |
| Cynthia Howell | Sp Ed Teacher | Huntington | WV |
| Leigh Hogsett | Parent | Huntington | WV |
| Christy Black | Parent | Milton | WV |
| Michelle Norweck | Parent | Barboursville | WV |
| Adam Collins | Guest | Grantsville | WV |
| Anrdea Roy | Marshall U. | Huntington | WV |
| Kelly Miller | Parent | Sweetland | WV |
| Jesse Miller | Parent | Sweetland | WV |
| Allison Miller | Adult with a disability | Sweetland | WV |
| Amy Kelly | WV Autism Trng Center | Huntington | WV |
| Tonji Bowen | Wayne Co. Specialist | Wayne | WV |
| Sherry Webb | Dir. Of Special Education | Wayne | WV |
| Rikki McCormick Lowe | Dir. Of Special Education | Hamlin | WV |
| Steve Kirch | WOWK - TV | Huntington | WV |
| **October 2019** |  |  |  |
| April Senic | Dir. Of Special Education | Elkins | WV |
| Darlene Clark | Physical Therapist | Elkins | WV |
| **November, 2019** |  |  |  |
| Adam Coon | Transition Specialist | Fayetteville | WV |
| Richard Petitt | Midland Trail HS Principal | Hico | WV |
| Stacy White | Meadow Bridge HS Principal | Meadow Bridge | WV |
| Franz Isaacs | Midland Trail HS Teacher | Lookout | WV |
| Brandon Wickline | Meadow Bridge HS Teacher | Meadow Bridge | WV |
| Robert Traxell | Midland Trail HS Student |  |  |
| Trey Lee | Midland Trail HS Student |  |  |
| Rachel Markley | Meadow Bridge HS Student | Danese | WV |
| Candice Price | Meadow Bridge HS Student | Meadow Bridge | WV |
| Allen Sexton | Dir. Special Education Raleigh Co. | Beckley | WV |
| Teresa Hammond | WVDE Early & Elem Learning | Charleston | WV |
| Margaret Taylor | YWCA of Charleston Sojourners Shelter Program | Charleston | WV |
| Michelle Hogan | Hancock Co. Transition | New Manchester | WV |
| Jessica Floyd | Fayette Co. Gifted Teacher | Oak Hill | WV |
| Michelle Bartlett | Fayette Co. Gifted Teacher | Oak Hill | WV |
| Tina Ellis | Fayette Co. SE Supervisor | Fayetteville | WV |
| Linda Palenchar | Dir. Of Special Education | Fayetteville | WV |
| **December, 2019** |  |  |  |
| Reginal Desmond | Disability Rights of WV | Charleston | WV |
| Melinda Walton | Tyler Co. Dir. Of Sp Educ. | Middlebourne | WV |
| Dave Roberts | Tyler Co. Board Member | Middlebourne | WV |
| Abran Highley | Tyler Co. Superintendent | Middlebourne | WV |
| Cami Williamson | Tyler Co. Social Worker | Sistersville | WV |
| Tricia Feldmeier | Tyler Co. Dir. Of HR | Middlebourne | WV |
| Kim Kehrer | Pleasants Co. Dir. Of Sp. Ed. | Sistersville | WV |
| Helen Wells | Pleasants Co. School Psy. | Belmont | WV |
| Deborah Novotny | Wetzel Co. Dir. Of Sp. Ed. | New Martinsville | WV |
| Morgan Lauff | Wetzel Co. School Psy. | New Martinsville | WV |
| **February, 2020** |  |  |  |
| Dr. Lyn Guy | Davis Stuart School, Supt. |  |  |
| Heather Falls | Parent | Lewisburg | WV |
| Dr. Tom Iles | Community | Lewisburg | WV |
| Emma Jean McKinney | Community, via letter | White Sulphur Spring | WV |
| Jessica Summurs | Parent, via letter |  |  |
| Karnertra Adams | Parent, via letter |  |  |
| Evelyn Dolin | Parent, via letter |  |  |
| Cincy Bechanan | Parent, via letter |  |  |
| David & Emily Alder | Parent, via letter | Ronceverte | WV |
| Jennifer McFarland Whisman | Marshall University | Huntington | WV |
| Nancy Hanna | Greenbrier, Asst. Supt. | Lewisburg | WV |
| Jonathan McPherson | Monroe Co. Asst. Supt. | Union | WV |
| Mary Ann Petrelle | Hancock Co. Interventionist | Weirton | WV |
| Kasey Carter | Davis Stuart School, citizen | Lewisburg | WV |
| Stephanie Williams | Davis Stuart School Ex. Dir. | Lewisburg | WV |
| Lisa Carter | Davis Stuart, Culinary Arts | Lewisburg | WV |
| **April 2020** | Virtual Meeting |  |  |
| **May, 2020** | Virtual Meeting |  |  |

**IN CONCLUSION**

The West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (WVACEEC) began the year with typical visits around the state. At those meetings, we met incredible staff, students and parents who care deeply about education in West Virginia. Special Education Directors from 17 counties presented highlights of successful programs and services in their local schools. Members of the Department of Education gave updates on policies, procedures, and statewide statistics. Issues, such as the opioid epidemic, IDEA problems, keeping qualified teachers, and behavior management were brought forward and respectfully discussed among the groups.

The WVACEEC was able to conduct 5 meetings around the state before March 13 when West Virginia moved into quarantine due to the impending Covid-19 pandemic. The decision to close schools was not an easy one and we would like to commend West Virginia leaders for acting quickly to ensure the safety of our children and education community. The adaptability of our teachers should also be applauded. Teachers who stepped up to learn how to teach online. Teachers who volunteered their time to deliver meals to student homes. Teachers who made very personal attempts to make sure their students’ needs were met. The Department of Education provided guidance and training to staff, students, and families around the state. In March and April, Infrastructure and Network Operations Coordinator Mark Moore provided online training which was attended by over 7600 individuals. Training sessions were offered on topics ranging from distance learning basics to full integration of Microsoft Office tools.

The 2019-2020 school year proved to be the most extraordinary in recent history. While West Virginia is far from perfect, we showed this spring that we are a resilient state, able to work together to ensure that everyone is taken care of. The enclosed suggestions are examples of how we can continue to improve. Additional funding focused on teacher preparation and retention, equitable access to 21st century technology, and a full continuum of services are steps toward building a solid, productive educational system throughout the state.

As this year’s chair and a third year member of the council, I would like to thank the Council’s Executive Director Susan White for her leadership and dedication to the special needs population of West Virginia, Susan Beck, Executive Director of the WV Department of Education Office of Special Programs for continued technical and financial support to the Council, and the many individuals who participated in our Council meetings this year.

Respectfully,

Melanie Hesse

Melanie Hesse, WVACEEC Chair

Director of Outreach, West Virginia School for the Deaf & the Blind