

**2022**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

*of the*

**West Virginia**

**Advisory Council**

**for the**

**Education of**

**Exceptional Children**

## 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, 2022

Melanie Hesse	Romney, WV	Schools for the Deaf and the Blind
Jacob Green	Madison, WV	WV Schools of Diversion/Transition
Brenda Lamkin	Buckhannon, WV	Parent, WVPTI
Erica Sauer	Weirton, WV	Special Education Administrator
Sheila Paitsel	Madison, WV	State Agency Representative
Emily Robinson	Grantsville, WV	Individual with a Disability
Patricia Sheuvront	Salem, WV	Parent
Debbie Lockwood	Barboursville, WV	Marshall University
Melanie Britton	West Union, WV	Parent, PERC
Cara Price	Buckhannon, WV	Parent, WVPTI
Shaquita Basileo	Falling Waters, WV	Parent, Educator
Mary Arbaugh	South Charleston, WV	Parent, WV Birth to Three
Rhonda Hayes	Racine, WV	Family Advocate, Legal Aid of WV

## 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

## 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, 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**

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. (PTI) 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 (PERC) 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.

Institutions of Higher Education are represented on the council by Marshall University (MU). 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.

The Council would like to commend the districts visited for their attention to providing students in West Virginia with an educational system that strives to meet the needs of all students, including students with exceptionalities. The council recognizes the effort by districts to ensure that student's academic, behavior and mental health needs are addressed. The council recognizes the priority that has been placed on providing students a multi-tiered system of support in light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic which exacerbated the academic, behavior, and mental health issues of both students and school staff members.

Each district visited addressed the overwhelming need for our state to continue to tackle teacher recruitment and retention. This topic has been addressed for several years by the council, and the problem continues to grow. The nationwide teacher shortage has dramatic consequences. The shortage of teachers and substitutes impacts both student proficiency rates and teacher professional development. Districts are unable to provide support to teachers, who are often unprepared to provide instruction to students due to their own lack of training and experience. Districts are reporting continued struggles with the behavior and social-emotional well-being of students and that remote learning has compounded the problem.

## **WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

The Office of Federal Programs/Special Education is to be commended for their continued 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.

The council recognizes the work of the special education office and the support they provide to districts utilizing a multi-tiered approach of universal, targeted, and intensive support. Districts are provided support by WVDE coordinator teams, which guide them through the improvement process. Districts are asked to develop a District Systemic Improvement Plan (DSIP). The DSIP identifies ONE focus area for a RESULTS indicator that does not meet the state target. The DSIP represents an identified area that is believed will systemically improve results in other areas of the district's annual desk audit (ADA).

## **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.

### **Meeting Sites 2022**

<b>DATES</b>	<b>DISTRICTS</b>
February 24, 2022	Kanawha
March 31-April 1, 2022	Logan, Lincoln
April 28, 2022	Morgan, Berkeley, WVSDB
May 19-20, 2022	Marion, Harrison, Monongalia

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

## Pervasive Issues and Concerns

While visiting districts across WV this spring, the overwhelming struggle reported by educators, parents, and community members was teacher recruitment and retention, and how student behavior and social-emotional issues affect classroom instruction. The proficiency rate and achievement gap of special education students also continues to be a concern for classrooms in WV.

Teacher recruitment and retention have been topics addressed to the Council by educators, parents, and community members for multiple years. Sadly, even with the efforts of the WVSBOE, WVDE, and districts across the state, the problem is getting worse rather than better. Teacher recruitment and retention is not only a problem in WV, but it is one of the greatest challenges to education nationwide.

For research purposes, national data will be used in this report. The Council recognizes that WV outcomes mirror national data related to teacher shortages, and the struggle to equip classrooms with certified teachers.

Burnout continues to be a driving force behind a nationwide teacher exodus that has left the industry with roughly a half-million fewer teachers. COVID-19 only exacerbated a shortage that was decades in the making.

A [recent NEA \(National Education Association\) survey](#) found that 55 percent of educators regardless of age or years of experience planned to leave the profession earlier than expected due to pandemic-related stress, with 91 percent of respondents saying stress from the pandemic is a “fundamental problem.” Around 96 percent of educators participating in the survey supported increasing teacher salaries to combat burnout.

Special education teacher shortages in WV have persisted for years, putting the education of the most vulnerable students at serious risk. General education teachers and students alike rely on special education teachers’ specialized knowledge in skills assessment and the development of learning activities with special needs and disabilities in mind.

Participants presented to the council that support specialists such as behavior interventionists, school counselors and school psychologists are also a part of the professional educator shortage. Prior to Covid-19 mental health issues of students were on the rise. Since Covid, mental health challenges for both students and teachers have increased. With mental health issues on the rise, school administrators and educators must be aware of the warning signs of mental illness and have an established plan in place to support students and families. Although they are not certified psychologists, educators are the adults who spend the most time with their students and have a responsibility to their students’ mental well-being.

The Council recognizes and applauds the WVDE on the inclusion of social-emotional support addressed in the updated WV Tiered System of Support (WVTSS). WV has had a long-standing relationship with Marshall University and The Autism Training Center. 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.

However, even with these resources available educators reported to the council that there are not enough school personnel available to support them or their students. Again, the issue of recruitment and retention is the problem.

***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 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.***

The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs currently lists the national shortage of teachers at 8 percent. This growing problem affects all schools, but the shortage pertains to more than just insufficient numbers of special education teachers. The shortage also refers to inadequate numbers of properly trained special education teachers. Many special education teachers have not completed special education preparation programs or are teaching without a background in education at all.

In recent years, enrollment in all teacher preparation programs has dropped considerably, and the number of people completing special education programs has dropped nationally by 14 percent, meaning fewer credentialed teachers are available for a growing number of vacancies.

Data shows that teachers with limited preparation tend to drop out of the profession more frequently than those who finish traditional preparation programs. The reliance on provisional and alternative credentialing programs that send underprepared special education teachers into classrooms contributes to the high teacher turnover rate.

Several factors are driving the special education teacher shortage. Steep enrollment declines in teacher education programs, alongside high attrition for special education teachers, contribute to the shortage. Low pay, and insufficient training and support also factor heavily.

Education leaders must address the special education teacher shortage if they hope to fulfill the promise of providing an equitable education to all. Ensuring that schools have sufficient numbers of well-trained special education teachers will play a critical role in closing the achievement gap. It will also create the stability needed to raise student achievement.

The teaching profession is a stressful profession. Stress is often associated with feelings of isolation, the pressures of high stakes testing and inadequate support to meet the complicated needs of students. Mental and behavioral health challenges, as well as the effects of trauma and poverty, are present in classrooms across the state and country.

Teacher shortages place a big burden on current teachers. Shortages increase that burden and can lead to higher levels of turnover.

The Council recognizes the bold efforts that have been made at some universities in WV to address the recruitment shortage. Some districts often provide financial support through tuition reimbursement upon completion of a program. Yet there remain critical shortages of highly skilled and specialized personnel in most schools throughout most districts in the state. Each district represented, reported numbers of unfilled positions, uncertified teachers, and the unmet needs of students as a result.

Research shows that professional learning, and how it is implemented can have a direct impact on teacher retention. All teachers need professional learning to grow their skills and effectively manage their classrooms. Non-certified teachers and individuals teaching without an educational background need support to survive in the classroom and to provide quality instruction to students.

These educators would benefit from professional learning targeted toward their individual needs ranging from classroom management to specific pedagogy and instructional programs. Although feedback from administrators and other professional support providers such as academic coaches is helpful to continued improvement in instruction, research is not showing that it is increasing teacher retention.

Research studies do show that being part of a strong and supportive network of peers or a study group is most effective in retaining teachers and one of the strongest predictors of improved student performance. Teachers learn and grow most effectively by working with one another and by engaging in networked improvement communities such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

***For these reasons, the Council recommends that the West Virginia Department of Education prioritize the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs have been in place in WV for many years, but schools and districts report that many are not effective in providing teachers with instructional support and providing teachers a community of educators to learn from and with. With the shortage of certified teachers, PLCs can provide an environment where noncertified teachers and long-term substitutes can gain skills necessary to support students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs.***

The Council had the opportunity to visit the WVDE Technical Assistance Center (TAC) for Accessibility & Transitions located in Romney, WV. The vision of the TAC is to improve educational equity for students with access exceptionalities by providing educational materials, assistive technology, transition, and support statewide through training and technical assistance to district staff. The TAC is a comprehensive center that serves all students under IDEA including Deaf/Hard of Hearing, Blind/Low Vision, Deafblind, and Specific Learning Disabilities. Access exceptionalities include students with disabilities such as communication, motor skills, computer access, organizational skills, reading, and mathematics.

To put it simply, TAC for Accessibility and Transition is for ANY student with a disability that needs support ***accessing*** their education.



The council recognizes the benefit of the TAC for Accessibility and Transitions in support of a wide range of students with disabilities and wants to emphasize the availability of resources and support to educators and students that many may fail to recognize as eligible such as students with a specific learning disability or students requiring organizational, reading, and mathematics support.

*For these reasons, the Council recommends that the West Virginia Department of Education and the Office of Federal Programs/Special Education make every effort to promote the TAC for Accessibility and Transition to make the districts, schools, parents, and families aware of the services provided and the wide range of students eligible.*

## PARTICIPANTS

The Advisory Council would like to express our gratitude to the following people who attended meetings across the State during the spring of 2022. Some provided information, some expressed concerns and others gave presentations for the Council to acquire in-depth information on topics of interest and concern.

Name	Position	Hosting District
<b>February 24, 2022</b>		
Megan McCorkle	Assistant Superintendent Special Education and Student Support Services	Kanawha
Kelly Melvin	Special Education Specialist	Kanawha
Heather Waselchalk	Lead Speech Language Pathologist	Kanawha
Vicky Brown	ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) Specialist	Kanawha
Michelle Robinson	Speech Language Pathologist	Kanawha
Karen Bradley	Speech Language Pathologist/AAC Coordinator	Kanawha
Rachel Brown	ID/AU Special Education Curriculum Specialist	Kanawha
Melissa Given	Assistive Technology Specialist	Kanawha
Brittany Harris	Assistant Principal, Horace Mann Middle School	Kanawha
Shandon Tweedy	Principal, Horace Mann Middle School	Kanawha
Beth Bowden (V)	Parent	Kanawha
Ashley Orndorff (V)	Parent	Kanawha
<b>March 31-April 1, 2022</b>		
Jill Barker	Logan County Special	Logan

	Education Director	
Kim Spurlock (V)	Special Ed Teacher	Logan
Jonathan Shank (V)	Coordinator, WVDE	Logan
Jane Brumfield (V)	Special Needs Aide	Logan
Stephanie Fryer (V)	Special Ed Teacher	Logan
Patricia Homburg (V)	Coordinator of Special Education, WVSDB	Logan
Whitney Ellis (V)	Principal	Logan
Thomas Vance (V)	Special Ed Teacher	Logan
Montana McCormick	Gifted Teacher	Logan
Lisa Vance	Evaluator	Logan
Lorrie Vance	Evaluator	Logan
Shawn Farmer	Evaluator	Logan
Amy Maynard	Special Needs Aide	Logan
Tracy Wolford	School Counselor	Logan
Dr. Traci Tuttle	Coordinator, WVDE	Logan
Terry Riley	Coordinator, WVDE	Logan
Mimi Browning	Coordinator, WVDE	Logan
Nancy Cline	Coordinator, WVDE	Kanawha, Logan, Hampshire, Marion
Joni Shortridge		Lincoln
<b>April 28, 2022</b>		
Nicole Hiles	Morgan County Special Education Director	Hampshire
Michele Tost	Berkeley County Special Education Director	Hampshire
Rachel Gill	WV Division of Rehabilitation Services	Hampshire
Mary Anne Clendenin	TAC	Hampshire
Nora Stevenson	Outreach Specialist	Hampshire
Anna Mae Fout	TAC	Hampshire
Stephanie Abraham	WVDE	Hampshire
Meegan Wolfe	Kanawha County Teacher	Hampshire
Lee Ann Brammer	Coordinator, WVDE	Hampshire
Debbie Adams	Deafblind Coordinator, WVDE	Hampshire
<b>May 19-20, 2022</b>		
Gia Deasy	Marion County Special Education Director	Marion
Patti Malone, MD	Cardinal Pediatrics Morgantown	Marion
Suzi Bryant	Cardinal Pediatrics Morgantown	Marion
Janie Gallagher	Special Services Liaison	Marion
Denise Morris	Behavior Specialist	Marion

Todd Gallagher	Classroom Teacher	Marion
Christina Hare	School Psychologist	Marion
LD Skarzinski	Administrative Assistant Curriculum and Instruction	Marion
Happy Plaughter	Doddridge County PERC	Marion
Susan Miller	Harrison County Special Education Director	Marion
Tiffany Barnette	Monongalia Director of Exceptional Students	Marion

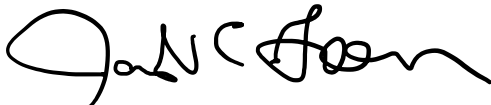
### IN CONCLUSION

The West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (WVACEEC) visited districts around the state and met incredible staff and community members who care deeply about education in West Virginia. Special Education Directors from 9 counties presented highlights of successful programs and services, as well as district struggles in meeting the needs of exceptional students in their local schools. Members of the Department of Education gave updates on policies, procedures, and statewide statistics.

While dealing with the Covid Pandemic was difficult for all students, this Council believes it was especially difficult for one of the state's most vulnerable populations: our special education students. We recognize that without a global pandemic these students often struggle in school and need additional support and help from our local school districts. The Council would like to extend special thanks to teachers and other educators for continuing to educate these students and for going above and beyond to ensure their education through very hard times. The Council would also like to thank the leadership of State Superintendent Burch to the building principals for continuing to light the way for our teachers to deliver education during the pandemic and now in difficult post-pandemic times.

As Co-chair I would like to thank the Council's Executive Director Dawn Embrey-King for her leadership and dedication to the special needs population of West Virginia, Sheila Paitsel Executive Director of the WV Department of Education Office of Federal Programs/Special Education for continued technical and financial support to the Council, and the many individuals who participated in our Council meetings this year.

Respectfully,



Jacob C. Green  
CO-Chairperson, WVACEEC 2021-22

