The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires each state to have an Advisory Council. 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 13 members approved by the State Superintendent of Schools.

**2023-2024 Council Members**

Jacob Green

Melanie Hesse

Cara Price

Deb Lockwood

Ashley Orndorff, Co- Chair

Happy Plaugher

Samantha Ribeiro-Matos

Katie Veazey-Keener

Rhonda Hayes

Erica Sauer, Co-Chair

Kelly Crow

Rachel Hatfield

Trina Clark

Sheila Paitsel, Non-voting WVDE liaison to the WVACEEC

**Council Staff**

Dawn Embrey-King, Executive Director

Becky Sloan, Administrative Assistant

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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.

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 (SPP/APR), 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.

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| **Date** September 22, 2023 |
| **Meeting Format**- Virtual Meeting (WVACEEC members only) |
| **Council Members Present:** Ashley Orndorff, Erica Sauer, Cara Price, Melanie Hesse, Happy Plaugher, Rhonda Hayes, Jacob Green |
| **Council Members Not Present:** Katie Veazy-Keener, Samantha Ribeiro-Matos, Deb Lockwood  Others present: Dawn Embrey-King; Sheila Paitsel |
| **Introduction of New Members:**   * Rachel Gill -DRS * Kelly Crow- Special Education Teacher, Kanawha County/parent of child with a disability * Trina Clark- WV Birth to Three Director/Service Coordinator Totally SC Inc./parent of children with disabilities   **WHO IS THE WCACEEC AND WHAT DO WE DO**  State Code and By-Laws  2023-2024 Calendar  Meeting Format Options  Meeting Topic/Speaker Options |
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| **Date** October 12-13, 2023 |
| **Meeting Format** Face to Face |
| **Districts-** Hampshire and Mineral |
| **Council Members Present (in person)** Ashley Orndorff, Erica Sauer, Kelly Crow, Jacob Green, Rachel Gill, Rhonda Hayes, Melanie Hesse  **(Virtual)** Cara Price, Samantha Ribeireo-Matos, Happy Plaugher, Trina Clark, Katie Veazey-Keener |
| **Council Members not Present** Debra Lockwood |
| **Others Present**  Dawn Embrey-King- WVACEEC Executive Director  Sheila Paitsel- WVDE Office Of Federal Programs; Director Office of Special Education  Kelli Wilson- Mineral County Board of Education; Director of Special Education  Susan Vance- Mineral County Coordinator fo Special Education Services  Brittany Gould- WVDE Schools of Diversion and Transition; Education Recovery Specialist  Deborah Spears- WVDE Schools of Diversion and Transition; Education Recovery Specialist  Cathy Green-Parent of 2 children with disabilities  Holly Sheldon- Disabilities Rights WV; Staff Attorney  Laura Turnman- Disabilities Rights WV; Staff Attorney  Maria Beckman- Disabilities Rights WV; Staff Attorney  Ian Shoulders- Disabilities Rights WV; Staff Attorney  Patricia Di Franco- Disabilities Rights WV; Staff Attorney |
| **WVDE Spotlight 10/12/23**  Sheila Paitsel shared with the council the 2021-2022 Annual Compliance Report (ACR)   * Showing ways that the WVDE is monitoring and supporting LEAs. * The ACR is a part of the Federal Office of Special Educations General Supervision Process * The report is broken down in sections to include: * Monitoring- compliance monitoring is a on a cyclical system where each district is monitored at least every 4 years * Annual Desk Audit (ADA)- Districts report out on 17 indicators. * Focused Monitoring is provided to districts that have issues/complaints. * Dispute Resolution - Parents have the right to file a complaint or request a Facilitated IEP (FIEP) or Mediation * Compliance Monitoring Findings- WVDE supports districts and provides technical assistance. * A list of non-compliant areas was provided. Examples include:   -Time and Effort (AF2)  -Full Instructional Day (AF6)  -Certification and Caseloads (AF5)   * During monitoring the WVDE pulls student files for review. Some areas of non-compliance are:   Amendments to IEP not being correctly documented.  Transition planning  Service verifications  Predetermining IEP decisions  PEP Plans   * Results of the ADA- 22 LEAs were out of compliance out of 57 districts * Determinations: Meets Requirements (51 LEAs), Needs Assistance (5 LEAs), Needs Intervention (1 LEA), Needs Substantial Intervention (0 LEAs). * There is a tiered system of support provided to districts by the WVDE. * There were 4 Out of State Residential Facility visits. * There were 15 Facilitated IEP (FIEP) requests, 14 of which were completed through agreement of both parties. * There were 21 State Complaints- 4 were deemed insufficient by OSEP, 3 resolutions, 5 withdrawn, 9 letters of finding in which the LEAs must make corrections. * There were 2 Mediation Requests- 1 pending, and 1 no agreement.   Most prevalent complaints:  -Failure to implement the IEP  -Failure to provide documentation of the IEP provision of service  -Failure to adhere to timelines for evaluations and IEP Team meeting |
| **Council Takeaways**  The WVACEEC takes areas of non-compliance and most prevalent complaints seriously**.** The Council is interested in how compliance issues and state complaints are improved and resolved.  The Council appreciates the openness and dialogue with the WVDE Office of Special Education.  It is noteworthy that compliance issues and state complaint areas are also the most common areas of concern when the council hears from educators and parents across the state e.g (transition planning, predetermining IEP determinations, failure to implement the IEP) |
| **District Reporting**  **Hampshire County 10/12/23** – LEA Special Education Director did not attend or provide information |
| **Guest Presentation 10/13/23**  **WVDE Office of Diversion and Transition**  **Education Recovery Specialists– Brittany Gould, Deborah Spears**  The role of the Education Recovery Specialist is to provide educational support to foster care youth (i.e., enrollment assistance.), gather supporting documents for special education services, link foster youth with outside agencies for additional services and support, and increase collaboration and communication between stakeholders, i.e. DHHR, foster care parents, childcare agencies, LEAs, and the WVDE.  **Discussion:**   * Foster kids that receive special education support have many hurdles (the school system and communication with DHHR) * Communication with DHHR- monthly report is easier to navigate than weekly report. * It would be nice for the recovery specialists to be trained on DHHR’s system. * Program specialist at WVDE disaggregates the weekly DHHR report. * MDT process is also difficult- schools report that they are not informed or invited to meetings. * MDT meetings are the “place where education people can advocate for foster children’s needs. * DHHR says that school personnel will not attend- makes no sense with virtual options. * Local DHHR share and have a relationship with LEAs. * WV is behind when compared to border states regarding communication between schools and DHHR. * Other states have one education person and one DHHR person in each county working side by side in support of students needing services. * Juvenile mental health providers and facilities have astronomical wait lists. * WV tops the list for kinship and foster placements.   **Mineral County- 10/13/23**  **Kelli Wilson Special Education Director presented to the council on County’s determination findings, highlights/successes/accomplishments as well as the struggles and challenges in providing support to students with exceptionalities.**  District Challenges   * Teacher and Classroom Aide shortages * Mineral County is down 5 special education teachers. This puts a heavy load on the certified teachers in the building who must do the paperwork. * The county lost 60 classroom aides from special education classrooms to 1st grade aide positions. * Behavior concerns of young students (preschool) * Difficulty providing intensive services to students. * No alternative programs * Mental health needs of 3- and 4-year-old students * There are local agencies working with Mineral County. * There is a need to bring up test scores and a discussion about the number of students on the alternate assessment (1%). * PBIS has been started in one school and restarted in another school. * The district had funded a BCBA with COVID monies that are now running out. * Currently there is no Parent Educator Resource Center (PERC) in the county.   District Highlights   * The county has trained 30 people on how to administer and support Threat Assessments. * The county utilizes facilities outside of the school system to support students with counseling and mentoring services. * These services are paid for with COVID funding which is running out. * District does an extensive Threat Assessment for students that might otherwise be recommended for expulsion. * 43 students have gone through the process resulting with only 3 expulsions * Of the 43, 13 were students with an IEP. * No special education students have been expelled as a result of the comprehensive threat assessment protocol. |
| **Council Takeaways**  The Council is very interested in the work and growth of the Education Recovery Specialists from the WV Schools of Diversion and Transition.  The council recognizes the need of support to both students, foster parents and school systems. There is a high number of students in special education in the foster care system. Special education services add another layer of communication and service delivery hurdles to students, schools and foster families.  **Recovery Specialists can assist with the following:**   * Enrollment into a new school * Transcript analysis to make sure student is on track to graduate * Document retrieval * Post High School planning for college * WV Department of Rehabilitation Service if needed * Link youth to services in the community   **Support to Schools**   * Document Locating * Student Support * Coordinate Communication   **Support to Foster Parents**   * Provide training through foster agencies on basic education services and resources * Connect foster parents to resources within the school * Establish open lines of communication with schools, DHHR workers, and agencies * Maintain contact to further assist youth in their care   **Council Takeaways from Mineral County Discussion:**   * Teacher and Aide Shortages * Difficulty providing services to students due to the lack of teachers and support staff * No PERCS * District Threat Assessment protocol seems very interesting and worthwhile for other districts to replicate |
| **Public Comments and Concerns 10/12-13/23**  Disability Rights of WV Staff Attorneys- Holly Sheldon, Laura Turnman, Maria Beckman, Ian Shoulders,  Patricia Di Franco   * Potential discrepancy of minority students regarding appropriate special education supports and services provided instead of automatic suspension/expulsion when behavior concerns are present. * LEAs going straight to truancy process rather than looking at a manifestation of student’s disability regarding school avoidance/absenteeism. * Teacher shortage and teacher training. Consideration of coaching and mentoring rather than traditional teacher training methods. * 3rd grade literacy success- some districts are delaying evaluations for dyslexia and providing interventions rather than evaluations. |
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| **Date** November 8, 2023 |
| **Meeting Format**- Face-to-Face |
| **Districts:** Cabell County |
| **Council Members Present**  **In Person**-Ashley Orndorff, Kelly Crow, Trina Clark, Rachel Gill, Katie Veazy-Keener, Deb Lockwood, Rhonda Hayes  **Virtual**- Melanie Hesse, Samantha Ribeiro-Matos, Jacob Green, Cara Price |
| **Council Members Not Present-** Happy Plaugher, Erica Sauer |
| **Others Present-**Sheila Paitsel, Dawn Embrey-King, Christy Black, Heather Scarberry, Suzanne Stevens, Melissa Cury, Stephanie Workman, Mindy Levisay |
| **WVDE Spotlight**  **Sheila Paitsel reported to the council**   * WVDE Office of Special Education held a bootcamp in Charleston for new special education teachers (less than 4 years). 250 teachers attended. * The bootcamp had sessions on IEP development and navigation of the online IEP * There were sessions on Behavior from WVDE BCBA and WV Behavior/Mental Health Technical Assistance Center (WVBMHTAC) at Marshall University. * Hampshire County is the only county in WV at the Needs Substantial Intervention level for several years. * WVDE is offering New IEP Facilitator Training |
| **Council Takeaways**   * The council appreciates the updates from WVDE. * The council recognizes the need and benefit to “new” teachers to participate in training like a bootcamp to support them in areas such as behavior management, mental health, and the development of compliant IEPs and the navigation of the online IEP. * The council is interested in learning more about facilitated IEPs and how this training would support not only the process for families needing mediation, but also to train IEP members on appropriate IEP meeting and communication protocols. |
| **District Reporting**  *Suzanne Stephens; Director of Special Education and Heather Scarberry; Director of Career Technical Education (CTE)*  *presented to the council on County’s determination findings, highlights/successes/accomplishments as well as the struggles and challenges in providing support to students with exceptionalities.*   * The director reported that the county staff was doing an exceptional job supporting students with exceptionalities in Cabell County * The director reported that co-teaching and special education subgroups and instructional practices in Targeted Schools is a weakness. * The county has identified mental health of students as a priority and provided Mental Health First Aide Training on November 9. 2023, and January 2, 2024 * Lexia Power Up has been piloted in middle school classrooms. * Academic Interventionists have been utilized to support students K-12. * The LEA stated that Positive Behavior Intervention (PBIS) is encouraged by the county but is optional and not utilized in all schools. * The district utilizes calming rooms for student de-escalation. * The district utilizes a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) for academics, behavior and mental health. * Each school has a counselor and behavior interventionist to support students. * The district participates in the Guidepost to Graduation program and grant and provides an after-school recovery teacher. * The district participates in the Teacher Induction Program (TIP). Year one had 16 participants and year two has 8 participants. * The county also participates in the Grow Your Own Program with 5 participants year one and 6 year two. * The county identified certified teachers and low incidence teachers as the greatest challenge. |
| **Public Comments and Concerns:**  ***Christy*** - Parent of student with Down Syndrome, Advocate for Students with Disabilities, Member of the WV Developmental Disability Council   * Christy reported that her daughter has had a wonderful year at Cabell Midland HS in Cabell County. * However, there were concerns that she wanted to address: * Co-teaching- She reported that there was a lack of staff in order to provide co-teaching services and a lack of experience and training of the teachers that they had. * Classroom video requests- She reported that the requests were not being honored within the 7-day timeline. * Self-contained classrooms- She reported that Cabell County has too many students participating in self-contained setting on an alternate diploma track. * Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA)- She reported that FBAs were not being completed or followed through with fidelity. * Resource Room Instruction- She reported that students are being sent to the resource room as a baby-sitter and for tutoring. * Clarification of Transportation Suspensions- She asked if transportation suspensions counted toward the 10-day suspension limitation. * Teacher Preparation Program- She asked how many hours there were to complete the program.   ***Melissa*** - Parent of a child in Pre-K who has Cerebral Palsy.   * She reported that she was concerned about the staff shortage of one-on-one aides in Cabell County. * She was concerned about the communication that was given to parents when aides were absent for the student to stay home that day. * She reported that there was not a clear chain of command of who is to cover if the aide is absent.   ***Stephanie*** - Parent of student in Pre-K who has behavioral issues.   * Parent reported that she has been contacted to come pick up her child from school when they were having behavioral issues. * Parent reported trying to get her son in a residential setting. However, parents are not able to make such a referral. * There was a discussion concerning classroom aide versus special education aide pay, and the fact that so many special education aides have transferred to general education aide positions Early Childhood Classroom Assistant Teacher (ECCAT). * Cabell County currently has no special education aide unfilled positions, however; there are no substitute aides.   ***Mindy -*** Parent of a student with a disability, who also works for the Cabell County BOE   * The parent indicates that more behavior interventionists are needed. * Child has a one-to-one aide, but there are no substitute aides if the aide is absent. * No clear chain of command for who supports the child if there is not an aide. * Mom is afraid to send child to school if there is no aide in the classroom. * Mom indicated that she is unsure of the number of days that the aide has not been present at school, but she is sure that there have been more days without an aide than with an aide. * Concerned about a lack of communication with the school. |
| **Council Takeaways**  Co-teaching has been an issue discussed with the council for several years. WV has made co-teaching a priority and provided local, state and national training over the years.  Certified Teachers  Lack of staff for co-teaching  LRE students in self-contained classes/alternate diploma path  Staff shortage of classroom aides  Parents told not to send students if aide is absent  Communication with school |
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| **Date** November 9, 2023 |
| **Meeting Format Face** to Face |
| **Districts:** Putnam County |
| **Council Members Present**  In person– Ashley Orndorff, Kelly Crow, Trina Clark, Katie Keener, Melanie Hesse, Rhonda Hayes, Jacob Green  Virtual- Rachel Gill, Cara Price, Erica Sauer |
| **Others Present**- Dawn Embrey-King, Sheila Paitsel, Susan Beck, Holly Sheldon, Hather White, Tonya Rutkowski, Patricia DiFranco, Carrie Maynard, Shawn Maynard |
| **Council Members Not Present**- Happy Plaugher, Samantha Ribeiro-Matos, Deb Lockwood |
| **District Reporting**  *Susan Beck: Director of Special Education presented to the council on County’s determination findings, highlights/successes/accomplishments as well as the struggles and challenges in providing support to students with exceptionalities.*   * The director reported that in Putnam County students with disabilities are considered general education students first. * The Science of Reading is a county initiative. * LETRS is also a county initiative. Training has been provided for all elementary teachers, speech therapists, special education teachers, school psychologists, and pre-school teachers. * The county is working with Greg Merrit who provides regular support to the county. * The director reports that the district’s determination finding indicates that Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a weakness. She reports that 22% of the IEPs written in Putnam County are for self-contained placements. * Co-teaching practices are also a weakness. * Putnam county has many students identified as students with autism. * Due Process Hearing last year resulted in district training provided on manifestation determinations for students with disabilities.   WVDE Spotlight – Guideposts to Graduation – Tonya Rutkowski discussed this State Systemic Plan focus designed to assist students and families in reaching the student’s post-secondary goals. West Virginia is a leader in the nation in graduation rate for students with disabilities. |
| **Public Comments and Concerns**  Carrie - addressed the council on behalf of their son, a student at Winfield Middle School.   * The parents had no concerns and a very positive experience when he was at Eastbrook Elementary School. * When child came to Winfield Middle he began having severe anxiety. * Child is very intelligent, but has behavioral outbursts, poor emotional regulation, can be violent and self-harm. * Child was provided a 504 plan in elementary school. He did not qualify for IEP in second grade. * During the transition to middle school the 504 plan and documentation were lost and the middle school said that they did not know that he had a 504. There was nothing in WVEIS * Student has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) * There was an incident in school where they had an active shooter drill. * Student was put in a smaller group for drill. * Student was placed in a small room while alarms were going off. Student soiled his pants during the drill. * Student was sent to the office and disciplined for 1 hour. He was given in school suspension and parent was called. * The student was allowed to have a fidget in class per his 504 plan, but a teacher took it away from him. * Student loved playing basketball and was very good at it. * Student tried out for the school basketball team but did not make it based on an “off the court score” * Off the court score which was based on behavior was 2/10. * On court basketball score was 27/30. * Parent filed a complaint with the Putnam County School Board on 11/9/23. |
| **Council Takeaways**  Susan Beck, Putnam County Director of Special Education is to speak to the Superintendent about the situation and get back in contact with the parents concerning their complaint filed on 11/9/23.  It was later reported by the BOE to the council that the student did not have an IEP, he had a 504 plan.  The district continues to work with the student, an advocate, and the parents to provide appropriate accommodations to support him.  The county reported that Least Restrictive Environment and Co-teaching continue to be areas that they struggle with. |
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| **Date**- February – Resource Fair |
| **Meeting Format**- Virtual |
| **Districts**- Statewide Training Opportunity |
| **Session Descriptions:**   * **WVABLE**- An important financial planning tool that equips eligible individuals with disabilities and their families to save and invest without jeopardizing their eligibility for public benefit programs, including SSI and Medicaid.  Earnings from the investments grow tax free and funds can be used at any time to pay for qualified disability expenses. * **Foster Care Support** **and Educational Services** -Providing educational support to foster care youth (i.e., enrollment assistance.) Gathering supporting documents for special education services. Helping to link foster youth with outside agencies for additional services and support, and increase collaboration and communication between stakeholders, i.e. DHHR, foster care parents, childcare agencies, LEAs, and the WVDE. * **CSEDW**- Children with Serious Emotional Disorders Waiver program provides additional Medicaid support to children from ages three to 21 with serious mental, behavioral, or emotional health needs. The program helps keep children with their families at home or in the community instead of going to a care facility or a group home. While they are at home or in the community, they receive services to improve their condition. * **ACES** (Living with Adverse Childhood Experiences) How trauma affects young people and families in WV. Participate in a conversation about how to support youth who are experiencing trauma. * **Preparing your child to graduate and transition to adulthood- DRS Services**- Supporting youth and adults with disabilities (ages 14 and up) on their path to work and living independently. Find out about services that are available to your child as they prepare to graduate high school. * **Special Education Laws and Policies** and how to ***advocate*** for your child and ***navigate*** through the system. Don’t be confused or afraid to ask for help when preparing for a meeting at your child’s school. Learn about support that is available to help you through the special education process. |
| **Council Takeaways and Participant Evaluation**  36 parent, family and educator participants registered and attended the sessions. Each participant had the opportunity to attend 3 sessions and receive information and resources to support them. Online evaluations were completed by both the attendees and presenters.  Attendees indicated that sessions were informative and relevant to their work or situation with their children.  Attendees requested that the next VRF be held during the evening so that more parents and families are able to attend.  Presenters reported that attendees were engaged and gave excellent feedback.  The council plans to continue Virtual Resource Fairs (VRF) during January and February each year to give parents, families and educators an opportunity to participate in sessions created in areas of need to respond to concerns that are brought to the council’s attention. |
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| **Date**- March 14, 2024 |
| **Meeting Format**- Face to Face |
| **Districts**- Marion and Monongalia |
| **WVACEEC Members Present**  **In person**  Ashley Orndorff, Kelly Crow, Happy Plaugher, Melanie Hesse, Katie Veazy-Keener, Cara Price, Erica Sauer, Rachel Hatfield  **Virtual**  Samantha Ribeiro-Matos |
| **WVACEEC Members Not Present-**Jacob Green, Deb Lockwood, Rhonda Hayes, Trina Clark |
| **Others Present**  Sheila Paitsel, Dawn Embrey-King, Toni Toothman |
| **WVDE Spotlight**- Grow Your Own- Teresa Bailey WVDE   * 4 pathways to becoming a teacher in WV   (1) Traditional- High School Graduate, 4-year degree in college.  (2) County BOE Certification (going away)  (3) State Approved Program – out of state  (4) Alternate Certification- WVDE   * 1,750 classrooms with uncertified teachers in WV which is up from 1500 last year * Currently 37 counties are participating in “Grow Your Own” (GYO) with 275 students participating   **Public Comments and Concerns**  ***Jacie***   * Has a 5-yr old son in preschool with an IEP which includes Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) support. * Parent is concerned the school will not continue ABA in Kindergarten. * Parent is concerned that he will not qualify for IEP academically but says that he still needs IEP supports for behavioral concerns. * Shortage of ABA therapy services   ***Jenn***   * Has a child in 2nd grade * Phenomenal teachers * 504 Plan for ADHD/Anxiety * Student is bored in school and is the oldest student in the class * Parent indicates that he is alienated in class * Some teachers have provided accommodations “under the table” * No formal accommodations are in place * Student making straight A’s * Ability masking disability * Parent reports that other counties offer gifted services earlier   ***Andrea***   * Son has Down Syndrome * Currently attends Clay Battle Middle School * Parent is considering modified diploma pathway, but has not decided to do so yet. * Parent indicates that student is supposed to have an aide * Parent reports that Special Education Director said they could not get him an aide * IEP says constant supervision and support * Parent reports that student is not in special education classes; that he is only in LD classes \*Council explained to parent that classes for students with a learning disability (LD classes) IS special education class. Parent thought that only self-contained classes were considered “special education” classrooms. |
| **District Report- Toni Toothman Marion County Representative**   * District focus on how to support substitute teachers * IEP workshop are being provided to teachers with stipends * An Autism Academy has been provided to support teachers * There is a plan to utilize veteran teachers as coaches for substitutes * There are currently 25 uncertified special education substitutes grades K-12 |
| **Council Takeaways**  The council is very interested in learning more about the Grow your Own initiative and seeing how the numbers of teachers in WV continues to grow as a result. The council would like to see a special education teacher’s cohort. |
| **Date**- March 15, 2024 |
| **Meeting Format**-Face to Face |
| **Project Seach History and Philosophy**  WVU Hospitals proudly became the first Project SEARCH host site in the state of WV, the Fall of 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic, and with several years and a small army working behind the scenes to get us to ‘day one.’  Historically speaking, Project SEARCH began in 1996 at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. The hallmarks of Project SEARCH are: 1. total workplace immersion and 2. a singular goal of competitive employment for every program graduate.  We strive to achieve that goal under the Project SEARCH model fidelity program by creating an atmosphere of high expectations.  Since Project SEARCH became a reality over 27 years ago, Project SEARCH has grown from one host site at Cincinnati Children’s to that of 713 sites in 48 states, 10 countries around the globe; has served 43,5571 young adults within these Programs and within these host sites  'People with disabilities have the right to choose a path toward education and employment. However, while freedom of choice is given, the right to work is earned.  Earning the right to work is dependent upon the student's preparation.'  Simon, Stephen, ADA Quarterly, Fall 1998.  **Program Description**   * 1 school year * 10 - 12 students with a variety of intellectual / developmental disabilities * Staffing: Special education instructor and skills trainers * Intern immersed in host business * Intern participates in three unpaid internships * Goal of employment in the **community** at end of program   + 16+ hours per week, non-seasonal   + In an integrated setting   + Earn Minimum Wage or better   **Project Search Eligibility**   * 18 – 24 years old - last year of school * Eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation and long-term services * Appropriate hygiene, social, and communication skills * Ability to take direction and follow work rules * Access public transportation * Pass health screen, drug screen and background check * Desire to work in community at end of Project SEARCH!   **Graduates’ Wage Progress and Career Development**  Project SEARCH graduates currently earn an average of $16.19/hour.   * 1. Since graduating, individual wages have increased an average of 6.89% and all have consistently earned higher than minimum wage.   Of the three employees from the first class:   * 1. Is a Security Ambassador earning $17.01/hour.   2. Is a Central Transport Support Associate earning $15.95/hour.   3. Is a Perioperative Care Assistant with Sterile Processing earning $17.89/hour. |
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| **Council Takeaway**  The council recognizes the importance of transition options for students with disabilities.  The council recognizes the efforts of WVU Medicine and Ruby Memorial Hospital in hosting Project Search.  The council values the work of Project Seach and how the program has provided students with WV job skills, experiences, and employment.  The council applauds WVDE for the funding provided to districts to hire a teacher and support the efforts of the program.  The council supports the expansion of Project Search Program to other areas of the state. |
| **April 18-19, 2024** |
| **Meeting Format**- Face to Face |
| **Districts-** Berkeley, Jefferson, Morgan |
| **WVACEEC Members Present**  **In Person-** Ashley Orndorff, Kelly Crow, Happy Plaugher, Jacob Green, Rhonda Hayes, Trina Clark  **Virtual-** Samantha Ribeiro-Matos, Melanie Hesse, Rachel Hatfield, Cara Price, Erica Sauer |
| **WVACEEC Members Not Present-**Deb Lockwood, Katie Veazy-Keener |
| **Others Present-**Sheila Paitsel, Dawn Embrey-King, Jenn Hitchcock, Sarah Delainey, Jessica Sykes, Laura Turman, Sam Showe, Alicia Ziman, Jonathan Shank, Kelli Duranko, Nichole Hiles, Matthew Wink |
| **WVDE Spotlight**  Jonathan Shank (WVDE/Office of Special Education) shared with council about results and compliance data  Data was shared from the SPP/APR submitted in February 2024 for FFY 2022   * Indicator 1- Graduation * Indicator 2- Dropout * Indicator 4A- Suspension/Expulsion * Indicator 4B- Suspension/Expulsion by Race/Ethnicity |
| **Regional Spotlight**  Alicia Ziman (Regional Behavior Support Specialist from the WVBMHTAC)   * PBIS Coordinator * Look at systems in place/organizing framework for schools to use * External Systems of “how to” * MTSS Tier I- All students receiving support * Tier II- Added layers of intervention * Tier III- Individualized supports/accommodations and services * Goal is to build Tier 2 supports in school, but recognizing it starts at the district level * Organize the system of support so that teacher/staff turnover would impact support * Consistent implementation of PBIS processes is lacking because of staffing issues (turnover/certification) * Puts district in reactive mode if system is not in place |
| **Public Comments and Concerns**  **Samantha**   * Inconsistent staff and unsupportive administration * Parent is requesting additional adult support * School is giving excuses of staffing and funding * Triennial was a “snapshot” due to not having adequate number of psychologists, no documentation of supporting claims * Berkeley County Schools (BCS) indicated that it is not acceptable to have no documentation * BCS reported that they have hired 3 virtual psychologist and have 5 psychologists working in person   **Sharon**   * Parent indicates that they have had overall a positive experience * Parent did not receive a progress report until the 3rd report card * Parent was not aware that the teacher was not certified   **Andrew**   * 2 children in BCS, moved there from Mon County * In Mon county there were sensory rooms available * Parent is concerned that there is no work sent home as indicator of work completed * Suggested visual schedule and other accommodations, but were dismissed by staff and administration * Son hit aide (concussion) * Asked if there was any summer programs in the county * BCS indicated that there was Extended School Year (ESY) and that the decision was made at student’s IEP meeting |
| **Council Takeaway**  The WVACEEC recognizes the importance of positive communication between parents/families and the school.  IEP teams must work together to support student needs. Parents must feel welcomed and heard. All members of IEP team meetings should have access to training materials for appropriate communication and IEP meeting protocol. |
| June 14, 2024 – The Council met in Charleston to discuss findings for the school year and plan the schedule for the 2024-2025 school year. Sheila Paitsel presented the response to the 2023 annual report of the WVACEEC. |
| The WVACEEC developed an online document for parents who were unable to attend a meeting in person or virtually, but still wanted to share information with the council through a digital format.  The document was shared on the WVACEEC Face Book page and email.  37 parents/families/educators submitted the online document. Each submission was provided with a response.  **Question on the online document:**   1. What are 3 things you support and like about your child’s school/educational environment? 2. What are 3 things that you are concerned about regarding your child’s education? 3. Is there anything else that you want to share about your child’s education? 4. Do you want to be sent the meeting link to the next WVACEEC virtual meeting?   **Common Areas of Support:**   * Communication between teachers and parents * Clean facilities * Teachers care about students and their well-being * Students making friends * Inclusion with non-disabled peers   **Common Areas of Concern:**   * Shortage of teachers due to turnovers * Shortage of teachers and aides due to absences * Parents feel like they are not welcome in child’s school * Parents feel they do not have a voice in child’s IEP Team meeting * Transition Planning   ***The WVACEEC makes the following recommendations based on parent/family/educator feedback and council takeaways:***   * Based on the critical need for qualified special education teachers in WV, the WVACEEC recommends that the WVDE continue to expand the **Grow your Own** Pathway to Teaching Program. The council recommends that funding be provided to create a specific cohort of special educators. * Based on the number of parents and families that the council heard from that do not feel heard, or that their input is valued regarding their children’s education, the WVACEEC recommends that 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. * Based on the 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. The WVACEEC recommends that the WVDE continue to expand the work of the WV Schools of Diversion and Transition **Education Recovery Specialists**. The council recommends that 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. * Based on the transition needs of students with disabilities and data from the WVDE Office of Special Education SPP/APR, the WVACEEC recommends the expansion of **Project Search** 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. The council recommends that Project Search be promoted at conferences and special education director’s meetings and calls. The council also recommends that Project Search be included as a transition option in the Office of Special Education’s Guidepost to Graduation pathway to post school outcomes. |