

State Advisory Panel for Special Education ANNUAL REPORT 2007-2008

OVERVIEW

The State Advisory Panel (SAP) provides input and recommendations to the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports on issues that will impact students with disabilities and their families. The Panel supports the mission of the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports which states “all students with disabilities in Georgia will participate in a challenging educational program designed to meet their unique needs that result in increased academic performance and prepares them for employment and independent living”.

The SAP also serves as the Georgia Stakeholder Group for special education and is pleased to report evidence of the continued improvement in academic achievement for students with disabilities. The Panel recognizes the need for continued collaboration between all educational partners to provide the resources, knowledge, and partnerships necessary to reach every child and commits to a continued focus on positive outcomes.

The SAP commends the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports for their hard work and for partnering with other Georgia Department of Education Divisions, local school systems and families in an effort to enhance the educational programs and services in Georgia’s schools.

STATE ADVISORY PANEL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION YEAR AT A GLANCE:

1. The 42 member Panel conducted four meetings in various locations around the state: (Helen, St. Simons, and two in Macon). The Panel was composed of parents, individuals with disabilities, teachers, administrators, and representatives from other agencies.
2. The first meeting included a new member orientation with 7 new members participating.
3. At each meeting, panel members had the opportunity to provide information from their respective organizations and to share the ideas/initiatives taking place across the state relating to students with disabilities.
4. Staff members of the GaDOE presented information to the Panel on the following topics: Positive Behavior Supports, Georgia Project for Assistive Technology, State Personnel Development Grant, Georgia’s Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process, State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report, Assessment, District Determinations, and the SLP Collaboration Project.
5. Each meeting consisted of structured work groups analyzing state data and evaluating state initiatives related to the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report.

6. The Panel conducted a public comment period during each panel meeting and received comments in person and via letter/email.
7. Four committees met at each of the meetings and reported summaries and recommendations back to the full Panel. These committees included: Membership, Dispute Resolution, Policy and Procedures, and Public Comment Review Committee (new).

SUMMARY OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES

1. **SAP Priorities.** The first meeting of the year focused on establishing Panel priorities for FY 08. Four priorities were established to coincide with the state performance goals for students with disabilities. The priority areas included RTI/Pyramids of Intervention, LRE/Inclusion, Transition, and Parent Involvement.
2. **State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR).** The Panel reviewed state data on performance goals and indicators listed in the State Performance Plan. After reviewing the data, Panel work groups advised the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports on revisions to indicator targets as well as the development of targets for new indicators in the SPP. The Panel also suggested revisions to some of the activities and initiatives in the State Performance Plan. They reviewed the Annual Performance Report prior to the February submission to the Office of Special Education Programs.
3. **LEA Determinations.** The 2004 revision to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that following the federal review of the Annual Performance Report, all states will receive an annual determination of *Meets Requirements, Needs Assistance, Needs Intervention, or Needs Substantial Intervention*. Georgia's determination status for FY 07 was "Needs Assistance" due to the data on Indicator 12. Seventy-eight percent 78 of children referred by Babies Can't Wait to the public schools had IEPs implemented by age 3, which was below the required 100%. The panel was also provided the summary data for local determinations for FY 07, which were made in July 2007, and FY 08, which were made in March 2008. GaDOE sought input from the Panel for suggestions for providing technical assistance to systems who continue to fall below state targets on the indicators used in making local determinations.
4. **Parent Survey.** Data indicating parent involvement in their child's education and the impact of their involvement is a required component of the State Performance Plan. As sponsor of the parent survey, the SAP was presented the survey results from the 2006-2007 school year. Over 51,000 surveys were distributed with a return rate of 11.1%. This rate is low but comparable to the previous year. The parent survey was initially developed and validated by the National Center of Special Education Accountability and Monitoring (NCSEAM). The panel recommended using the shortened survey for a second year and allowing systems additional time to disseminate the survey and for parents to return the survey. In addition, a provision was also put in place to allow school

systems to respond to the vendor with the exact number of surveys distributed in order to get a more accurate return rate.

5. **Dispute Resolution.** During FY 07, the Panel committee on Dispute Resolution worked on designing a brochure outlining the dispute resolution process for parents and school districts. A final version was presented to the Panel at the April 2008 meeting. It was the Panel's desire to have the brochure available in various formats including print and the GaDOE website.
6. **State Advisory Panel Policies and Procedures.** The Panel utilized the new Georgia State Advisory Panel Operating Procedures, which were developed by the FY 07 Panel. Formalized procedures have provided the structure and support necessary for the panel to conduct business and remain focused on the responsibilities outlined by IDEA and the Georgia SAP mission. A standing Panel committee continues to review the procedures and offers recommendations on areas that need review. The committee began the work of creating a brochure on the role of the SAP and would like to make this brochure available statewide in the near future.
7. **State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG).** Last year the Panel provided input on activities for the State Personnel Development Grant application which was submitted to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in March. In September 2007, the Panel was informed that the state received the five year grant funded by OSEP effective September 1, 2007. The goals of the grant were shared with Panel members who serve as the SPDG Partnership Steering Committee. The SAP will receive periodic updates and opportunities to discuss the various activities of the SPDG.
8. **Student Input and Comment.** The State Advisory Panel coordinated with Muscogee County Schools to gather student input via videotaped student interviews. The students spoke about the support and services that they receive as well as the challenges they encounter in their school settings. The students indicated strong feelings regarding being labeled as special education students. They also stressed the importance of post secondary plans. The Panel continues to look for ways to gather meaningful student input related to Panel priorities and activities.
9. **Transition.** The Panel reviewed the draft version of the *Georgia Transition Manual: Framework for Local Districts*. Suggestions were provided to the Divisions such as adding additional points to the checklist, adjusting the timeline to reflect events that should occur at certain time periods prior to exiting high school rather than reflecting what should occur at each age, and distributing the checklist at IEP meetings. Due to the size of the transition manual the Panel work group focusing on transition recommended the Panel take on the task of creating a one page transition fact sheet.
10. **Georgia Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (GCIMP).** The Panel continues to play a major role in developing the GCIMP process. As Georgia's stakeholder team, the panel targeted two performance goals this year: "increase performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments when given

appropriate accommodations” and “decrease the percentage of students with disabilities who drop out of school”. The Panel was provided a summary of the Focused Monitoring Process in which 19 school systems were monitored this past school year. In addition, the Panel reviewed system level data for systems who previously received Focused Monitoring. The Panel provided the GaDOE with input on targeted indicators for Focused Monitoring initiatives for FY 09.

- 11. 2% Assessment.** The SAP wrote a letter in support of the grant application for the development of an assessment that is based on modified academic achievement standards for up to 2% of students who are not appropriate for participation on the regular statewide assessment or the Georgia Alternate Assessment. Melissa Fincher, Director of Research and Test Development for GaDOE, spoke to the Panel to inform members the grant was awarded to the Department. The SAP will continue to serve as advisors to the development of the 2% assessment and Ms. Fincher will report to the Panel throughout the two-year test development period. There will be a parent training component once the assessment is developed.
- 12. Restraint and Seclusion Guidance.** The Panel received information regarding Guidance on the Use of Restraint and Seclusion. The Positive Behavior Supports Unit in the Division for Special Education Supports has worked on a draft guidance document and has sought input from a variety of stakeholder groups. The April SAP meeting provided an opportunity for Panel members to provide input for the guidance document.

PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on diverse perspectives, the Panel provided input to the Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports as it strives to improve outcomes for students. The following includes a list of recommendations the panel presents to the State Board of Education based on the various discussions held throughout the year:

- 1.** The State Advisory Panel recommends the continuation of Focused Monitoring for the achievement of students with disabilities in mathematics and reading. The Panel recommends the examination of data in the areas related to absolute performance and gaps in achievement between students with and without disabilities. In addition, the Panel recommends the expansion of monitoring for the indicator of decreasing the drop-out rate of students with disabilities for the 2008-2009 school year.
- 2.** The State Advisory Panel recommends that the guidelines for restraint and seclusion apply to all students in Georgia and that they be disseminated to all local education agencies and state operated programs. The Panel recommends the State Board of Education develop partnerships with other state agencies and entities that serve or advocate for children in order to explore a rule, policy, and/or legislation to provide consistency in the use of restraint and seclusion across agencies.

3. The State Advisory Panel recommends that the GaDOE continue to develop resources to support school systems in their efforts to provide special education and related services to students with autism.
4. The State Advisory Panel recommends for the GaDOE to acknowledge and to recognize a Georgia Co-teaching Team of the Year.
5. The State Advisory Panel recommends the GaDOE create a press release for the distribution of the parent rights and dispute resolution brochures. They recommend that these brochures also be made available through the state's Parent Training and Information Center, Parent to Parent of Georgia.
6. The State Advisory Panel recommends continued information sharing and collaboration between the GaDOE and Babies Can't Wait regarding data sharing, timely referrals and transition from Part C to Part B.
7. The State Advisory Panel recommends that the GaDOE encourage local systems to link to the Parent Mentor website to increase parent engagement.
8. The State Advisory Panel recommends the GaDOE update the public website to provide easier access to information for the general public. This may include the "search function" or other features.
9. The State Advisory Panel recommends that the work on the Response to Intervention Georgia Student Achievement Pyramid of Interventions initiative should continue and develop guidance for local systems.
10. The State Advisory Panel recommends that the GaDOE continue advocating for legislation to re-structure funding for special education for students with disabilities.

Debbie Twiford
 Chair
 State Advisory Panel for Special Education

Stephanie Moss
 Co-Chair
 State Advisory Panel for Special Education