

Special Education Task Force Minutes  
November 14, 2023  
9:30-11:30 - In-Person @ CAPSS  
Virtual Option Was Available

The meeting began at 9:30 AM

Introductions of all in attendance took place:

1. Patrice McCarthy, Executive Director & General Counsel for the CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE)
  2. Donna of Meriden Public Schools filling in for Michael Grove
  3. Karen Helene, Director of Benjamin School, representing CAPSA
  4. Heather Tartaglia, Chief Program Officer of CREC, representing the RESC Alliance
  5. Kathryn Meyer, Attorney at the Center for Children's Advocacy and Director of the Medical Legal Partnership at the Yale Child Study Center
  6. Tiffany Jackson, Executive Director of Student Services, Special Education for the New Haven Public Schools
  7. Jennifer Lussier, representing the CT Parent Advocacy Center
  8. Stephanie Wanzer, Special Education Teacher for 18–22-year-olds, representing CEA
  9. Tara Flaherty, Parent and Secretary of CEA
  10. Nicole O'Connell, Director of Social Services in Naugatuck, President-Elect of ConnCASE
  11. Bryan Klimkiewicz, CSDE Special Education Division Director
  12. Frances Rabinowitz, Executive Director of CAPSS, Co-Chair of the Special Education Task Force
  13. Andrew Feinstein, Special Education Attorney in Private Practice, Co-Chair of the Special Education Task Force
  14. Susan Yankee, Chair and Parent Member of the CT State Advisory Council for Special Education
  15. Kevin Keating, Pupil Services Director at ACES
  16. Kathie Gabrielson, Director of Pupil Services for Stafford Public Schools, immediate past president of ConnCASE, representing the public
  17. Dr. Megan Pogonowski, Director of Special Education in Oxford
  18. Alicia Bowman, Associate Executive Director for the Connecticut Association of Schools
  19. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Superintendent of the Hartford Public Schools
  20. Louis Rosado Burch, representing CEA
  21. Orlando Rodriguez, representing CEA
  22. Rosalie, Legislative Aide
  23. Dawn Cole, Office Supervisor of CAPSS
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- Finding Report due January 1st
  - Our purpose for today's meeting is to try to arrive at certain findings and call down what our priorities are going to be for next year.
  - Although the Legislation established nine (9) areas that we were supposed to look at we have done some work in some of those areas but haven't addressed others.

## 1. Review of Findings to Date

- a. While Andy and Fran co-chair this Task Force, their job is to facilitate the discussion of the Task Force and the final outcomes of the Task Force.
- b. Whatever the findings are which will later become recommendations, need to be yours (the committee).
- c. Final Report due in January 2025.
- d. The committee received a list of the findings from the Task Force members/subgroups. They were compiled into one document and sent out to the Task Force for review. A call for additional findings was made by Fran.

## 2. Additional Findings from Individuals and Groups Represented

- a. Typhanie Jackson - would like the Task Force to look at special education funding as it relates to charter schools and open choice. It is a huge burden on large urban districts.
- b. Typhanie is also hoping that there is something that really speaks to the teacher experience enough to be able to make sure that we have a lasting teacher force in that group if we have an opportunity that our task force is able to acknowledge that.
- c. One more meeting (December 12th)
- d. Three sub committees - the hope is that the representatives have represented the stakeholders.
- e. After today Andy will write the report based on today's findings.
- f. It is not going to be easy - we would like to bring forth five major findings.
- g. Seclusion and restraint are huge - that will need to be a finding. It is under the eligibility subgroup.
- h. We need to decide whether we want to claim those areas or leave them to others.
- i. CT-SED - do we want to say anything about that or as people get more familiar with the program are they not as important?
- j. Andy noted that the idea is to write something between now and the December meeting. Once the preliminary report is presented to the task force, we can amend it at that point.
- k. Kathryn Meyer noted that something she didn't see noted in the findings is talking about the parent experience and the meaningful participation in the PPT process, which is the largest issue she deals with daily. Parents need to be able to understand what is going on. They need to have the ability to ask questions and not be dismissed or stifled. They need to not be told that this meeting is 45 minutes and we are going to leave in 45 minutes. Parents are and need to be part of the decision-making team.
- l. Bullying piece - very often they are told it is not a discussion for this meeting - if bullying is accessing services - we are not going to be the arbiter to see if bullying happened - we do need to acknowledge the parent that we understand this is your child's experience.
- m. We noted in the beginning that we would not go into CT-SEDS. It may come up as a sub-category under shortage of staff. It will not be a major topic in itself.
- n. Tiffany - point and purpose for why we are here – teacher shortages, teacher burnout, all these things that lead to the fact of us not being able to provide adequate service. If we don't address these major issues and talk about the teacher experience enough to be able to make sure that we have a lasting teacher force moving forward.

- o. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez reviewed the findings and saw a subtle reference to cultural responsiveness. She wonders if there is an opportunity to be more explicit about cultural competence and its role in the over-identification of special education students.
  - p. Understanding diverse backgrounds helps all of us as educators recognize those variations in learning styles and behavior.
  - q. Without that there is a risk which many of us know of misrepresenting cultural norms as indicators of disabilities.
  - r. Lack of access given to linguistic differences. That too plays into over-identification.
  - s. State should have a pricelist (CEA)
  - t. Costs are very different based on county. Fairfield County is far more expensive than New Haven County etc.
  - u. Alicia Bowman noted that with the limited amount of ties and in this setting, it may be better to have people rate the findings independently and let the top findings rise to the top as our top five (5).
  - v. General discussion took place on eligibility.
  - w. Andy – We are here to make recommendations that may change law or policy. Andy asked Bryan - Are there any other changes that you see as necessary in the whole eligibility field? Bryan replied: It is important to provide planning and placement teams with updated information around comprehensive evaluations.
  - x. The interplay between tier interventions and general education. How that informs planning and placement teams, and then the concept of what it means to exit a student from special education. There isn't often a lot of discussion around that.
  - y. Once students are identified at a young age they stay identified for the most part. Providing support to the teams around the process on both what it looks like to identify and what the exit criteria is for students.
  - z. Services Subcommittee
    - i. Some of these have been discussed in other findings.
    - ii. Staffing shortages in general
    - iii. We can talk about all of the findings but if you don't have enough staff, none of this matters.
    - iv. Define what paperwork is. Is there something there that can be adjusted?
    - v. RESCS have a smaller caseload, trained paraprofessionals,
    - vi. Case management can be a clerical task.
    - vii. Case management is affecting the caseloads.
3. We have additional findings from Andy, Jason, and Stephanie but if there is anything in those findings that you are a 5 or 4 on please let us know.
  4. With the Task Force's permission Fran would like Andy to take a stab at writing the initial report based on today's discussions and forward the report to the task force several days before the next meeting for review. At the next meeting on December 12<sup>th</sup> we can review further and make additional changes.
  5. Adjourned at 11:40 AM.
  6. Next Meeting- Tuesday, December 12, 2023 – 9:30 AM @ CAPSS