

EXHIBIT B-1

MINUTES

LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON BEST PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Meeting

Wednesday, October 7, 2015

The Legislative Task Force on Best Practices for Special Education met on Wednesday, October 7, 2015 at 1:00 p.m., in Room 130 of the State Capitol Building, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Members in Attendance

The following legislators attended: Senators Uvalde Lindsey, Chair; and Blake Johnson, and Representative Sheilla Lampkin. **Non-legislative members:** Ms. Carla Brainard, Ms. Lisa Haley, Barbara Hunter-Cox, Ms. Renee Johnson, Ms. Sarah Moore, Ms. Bailey Perkins, Ms. Debra Poulin, Ms. Shirley Ann Renix, Ms. Lisa Tisdale-Parker, Ms. Tina Vineyard, Ms. Cindy Marie Weathers, Ms. Angela Winfield, and Mr. Samuel Young.

Other legislators attending: Representatives David Fielding, Mary “Prissy” Hickerson and James Sorvillo.

Senator Lindsey called the meeting to order.

Update on the Personnel Development Grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs [EXHIBIT B, HANDOUT 1]

Ms. Lisa Haley, Associate Director, Special Education, Division of Learning Services, Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), was recognized. She said there are many points of data used to develop the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) that greatly impact the work with special education.

Ms. Jennifer Gonzales, Coordinator, SSIP and Director, State Personnel Development Grant, (ADE), was recognized. She presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled, “Overview of the State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) and State Personnel Development Grant” [HANDOUT 1].

Ms. Gonzales discussed the SSIP and the State Personnel Development Grant in detail. She said SSIP is a comprehensive, multi-year federal plan that ADE has to support at the state level and provide information and evaluation to the Office of Special Education for the next 6 to 8 years. The plan was created to support and build the capacity of local educational agencies (LEAs) to implement, to scale up, to sustain best practices, and to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Each state was given the opportunity to tailor a plan according their states’ needs.

SSIP was rolled out in phases that included data and infrastructure analysis that guided the selection of coherent improvement strategies. The point of the strategies is to increase the states’ capacity to provide meaningful change for LEAs and improve results for all students specifically, students with disabilities. Arkansas’ identified focus is literacy achievement. Over the past 8 years, trend data were investigated for students with disabilities. During the 2006-2007 school year, 17% of students with disabilities were proficient in the statewide assessment. However, during the 2013-2014 school year, 32% of students with disabilities were proficient. Ms. Gonzales said the difference between general education students and students with disabilities by grade level showed a huge gap across the board. For instance, when students transition into middle school, junior high, and high school, their proficiency levels decreased significantly. Based on a survey, stakeholders expressed needing assistance with selecting and implementing evidence-based practices and assessing the implementation process to ensure that it is being implemented with fidelity to get the best outcomes. High quality special development and technical assistance is also needed on how to individualize and differentiate instruction.

Levels of development in SSIP Phase II include building state-level capacity through the alignment and coordination of efforts/systems to support LEAs capacity to implement evidence based systems and practices. SSIP infrastructure strategies include redesigning a tiered state monitoring system that includes a focus on results with an emphasis on literacy; and creating a special education professional development (PD) and technical assistance (TA) system that aligns with other ADE Units and is differentiated by a districts' data or needs. LEA capacity building strategies will increase response-to-intervention (RTI) supports for academics and behavior by:

- creating a tiered system of supports for literacy,
- creating a tiered system of supports for behavior; and
- increasing and supporting the number of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

The State Personnel Development Grant is a \$5 million, 5-year grant that will be used to:

- develop RTI literacy and behavior resources and tools,
- provide professional development and technical assistance to districts and schools to assist all students; and
- evaluate implementation fidelity and outcomes at the state, regional, district, school, and student level.

Regarding the aggregated discipline data, Ms. Perkins asked are there higher suspension rates within special education for children of color; and do you see it play out differently within the different areas in the state? Ms. Gonzales replied, we analyzed literacy proficiency by race however, ADE did not investigate race as it relates to disciplinary actions.

Discussion of Certification and Licensing for Special Education Aides and Teachers

Ms. Ann Clemmer, Senior Associate Director, Academic Affairs, Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE), was recognized. She presented Handout 2. Ms. Clemmer discussed proposed options for increasing the number of teachers for special education, revisions to rules governing educator licensure and waivers. Notably, ADHE has not always offered a bachelor's degree in special education. Ms. Clemmer reported that ADHE will allow special education master of teaching (MAT) programs, pending finalization of rules and policies governing educator preparation approval. Before a provisional license is issued, the following special education MAT program requirements must be met:

- three credit hours of coursework,
- completion of a special education 101 academy; and
- successful completion of the content area assessment for special education.

It was noted that ADHE is working with ADE in this effort.

Task Force Assignment Updates

- Mr. Young reported that his teacher understands the importance of the IEP, but feels that the paperwork is repetitious and very time consuming. It was suggested that tablets or other technology could possibly eliminate some of the paperwork.

- Ms. Bailey reported there is not a lot of research available regarding special education teachers aides and paraprofessionals. She is in the process of identifying which states the task force is interested in identifying as model states and salaries for special education teachers. Ms. Bailey expects to have this information available at the next meeting.

- Ms. Debra Poulin reported that Disability Rights of Arkansas (DRA) is taking a close look at identifying alternative learning environments (ALEs), the diversion of resources, and how many children special education students are being placed in ALEs. She also noted that an inquiry soliciting information of advocates in other states has been posted on DRA's website regarding efforts to reduce paperwork. Computerized systems that include model forms with drop down boxes have been extremely successful in other states.

- Ms. Renee Johnson shared that an informal survey was sent to special education teachers informing them of the task force and asking for their input regarding recruitment efforts for additional teachers, pay increases and/or stipends and the use of paraprofessionals in the classrooms. Ms. Johnson said most teachers reported that they would love a stipend and more days to complete paperwork.

- Ms. Shirley Renix reported that teachers conveyed to her that they did not have the resources to adequately teach their students.

Senator Lindsey asked is there a way to create a common form or database for special education to utilize. Ms. Haley replied, ADE is investigating ways to reduce the exorbitant amount of paperwork and duplication.

It was noted that Ms. Haley will provide the results of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Assessment when it becomes available.

Next Meeting Date

Wednesday, November 4, 2015, at 1:00 pm in Room 130 of the State Capitol Building.

Next Meeting Agenda Items

Ms. Lisa Haley - Discussion of the State Annual Determination Report as related to the Duties and Responsibilities of the Task Force as Outlined in Act 839.

With no further business, the task force adjourned at 3:15 p.m.