

**Preschool Special Education Working Group
Tuesday, September 24, 2019
1 – 3 p.m., Room 1A, Legislative Office Building**

Meeting Minutes

Attending: *Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood; Bryan Klimkiewicz, Division Director, Bureau of Special Education, State Department of Education; Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate; Myra Watnick, Executive Director, Rehabilitation Associates of CT, Inc.; Elisabeth Teller, Director, SARAH Inc. – Kidsteps; Donna Notti, Birth to Three Coordinator, Cheshire Public Schools; Michael McGrath, Director of Special Education, C.E.S; Deborah Richards, Director of Student Services, Capital Region Education Council (CREC); Amy Margelony, Interim Director of Pupil Services, EASTCONN; Jodi Minotti, Director of Specialized Services & Supports, EdAdvance; Eric Protulis, Director of Pupil Services, ACES*

Special guests: *Rep. Bobby Sanchez, Chair, Education Committee and Rep. Kathleen McCarty, Ranking Member, Education Committee.*

Introductions

Commissioner Bye welcomed the members to the first meeting of the Preschool Special Education Working Group. Each of the members introduced themselves.

Review of P.A. 184- An Act Concerning the Provision of Special Education

The working group was established by P.A. 19-184 – An Act Concerning the Provision of Special Education. Commissioner Bye provided an overview of the legislation.

The Act provides specifies categories for the membership and charges the Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood with convening the first meeting. The working group is charged with studying issues related special education and related services during the period a child is no longer eligible for Birth to Three services and is not yet enrolled in kindergarten. As part of the study, the working group will review and evaluate any practices of policies of the Office of Early Childhood or local or regional boards of education that may result in a child experiencing a disruption in or cessation of services during this period. The working group shall submit a report with finding and recommendations to the Education Committee by January 1, 2020. The working group will terminate on the date that it submits the report.

IDEA Eligibility and Birth to Three Exits

Alice Ridgway, Manager of the Birth to Three program, provided an overview of Birth to Three and trends in children exiting the program. Birth to Three provides in-home services to about 10,000 children during the course of one year. The program is voluntary. Referrals and enrollment are increasing. Ridgway noted that the exit data would be informative as the working group examines the issue and formulates recommendations.

High-level data shows that, in FY18-19, 5,456 children exited from the program. Of the 5,456, 3,540 (65%) exited at age 3; 916 (17%) parents withdrew; 371 (7%) were no longer eligible; and 629 (11%) exited for other reasons. Of the 3,540 that exited at age 3, 2,465 (45%) were eligible for Part B 619; 361 (7%) were not eligible with other referrals; 285 (5%) were not eligible with no other referrals; and 429 (8%) Part B eligibility unknown.

Bryan Klimkiewicz, Division Director of the Bureau of Special Education at the State Department of Education, provided a brief overview of Part B 619. He recognized Andrea Brinnel as the 619 Coordinator, who was unable to attend. Bryan said the goal is to ensure a seamless transition from Birth to Three to public schools, whether a child is eligible or not for preschool special education services. He provided an overview of the criteria for eligibility for Part B services. There is a transition process for children existing Birth to Three and entering the public school system. A transition meeting must take place 90 days before a child turns age three. A team then makes a determination whether the child is eligible for Part B services.

Purpose and Vision

The working group discussed the legislation's purpose. Rep. McCarthy asked what is happening to the children who are not determined eligible for Part B services. She said that Connecticut must ensure that all children receive the services they need.

Commissioner Bye said there is a difficult situation happening in many school districts when a child is attending a community-based preschool and is eligible for Part B services. The child is picked up by a school district bus and transported to the public school for a few hours of Part B services and then transported back to the preschool. She said this causes disruption and loss of care at the preschool. She noted that some families refuse Part B services because they choose to keep their child in the preschool.

Deborah Richards, Director of Student Services at Capital Region Education Council (CREC), said it is big change for children transitioning from Birth to Three to Part B services. Birth to Three services take place in the home; Part B takes place in a public school district setting.

Sarah Eagan, Child Advocate for the Office of the Child Advocate, noted that there are disparities in Part B services in different parts of the state. She asked if information could be provided about available resources across districts. Eagan said that families lose care coordination upon transition to Part B, putting families at sea. She asked if there is a role for the OEC to administer a B-5 system.

Commissioner Bye said one problem area to address is loss of care during the summer months. If a child turns three in May, that child loses Birth to Three services and does not receive Part B services until the start of the school year. The OEC has projected it would cost approximately \$500,000 to \$800,000 for Birth to Three to continue services through the summer months to avoid cessation of care.

The working group discussed several other issues including Medicaid and private insurance billing, screening and referrals, aggregating data by race, diagnosis, etc.; and flexibility of the School Readiness program concerning hours of care. Commissioner Bye summarized the issues discussed:

- 1) Children who are eligible and not eligible for Part B
- 2) Equity by zip code
- 3) Transition from a private setting to a public setting
- 4) Other community resources available
- 5) Summer transition
- 6) Medicaid and private insurance
- 7) Landscape survey of services provided across school districts

Commissioner Bye suggested that a hearing be parents be held to gather their voice and ideas.

Election of Chair

The working group elected Commissioner Bye to serve as Chair by a voice vote. Klimkiewicz made the motion; Eagan seconded the motion.

Future Meetings

The next meeting is October 22, 1 to 3 p.m., Room 1A, LOB.

Adjournment

The working group adjourned.