

**Preschool Special Education Working Group
Tuesday, October 22, 2019
1 – 3 p.m., Room 1B, 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; 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; Bridget Gordon-Hickey, Associate Executive Director of Student Support Services, LEARN*

Special guests: *Andrea Brinnel, Part B Coordinator, State Department of Education; Diane Murphy, Chief Performance Office, State Department of Education; Virginia Brown, Staff Attorney, Office of the Child Advocate; Alice Ridgway, Manager, Birth to Three program, Office of Early Childhood; Nicole Cossette, Research Analysis, Birth to Three program, Office of Early Childhood*

Introductions

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

NIEER Needs Assessment

Andrea Brinnel informed the working group that the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has been selected by the State Department of Education (SDE) to conduct a statewide needs assessment to collect information about the quality of preschool programs in which 3- and 4-year-olds receive services as part of their IEPs. Brinnel said there was a strong response to the RFP and many of the applications were outstanding.

The needs assessment will identify strengths and weaknesses of the preschool settings. NIEER will disseminate surveys to three groups: Directors of Special Education (all); Early Childhood Supervisors (randomly chosen sample); and preschool center directors/principals in public schools (randomly chosen sample). The surveys will be sent out soon and data will be collected in December. A draft report is expected in February and a final report will be provided in March. NIEER will come to Connecticut to present the report findings. Brinnel noted that the data will be provided in aggregate. The information will guide SDE to determine the need for technical assistance and further investment.

Commissioner Bye asked if there are questions in the survey about transition. Brinnel said while there may be a question about transition, the focus of the survey is about the quality of services provided. Deborah Richards noted that the RESCS conducted a survey of special education educators a few years ago.

OEC Part C and SDE Part B Data

Alice Ridgway presented data, as requested from the first meeting, about Birth to Three exit data by race and ethnicity. Diane Murphy also provided similar data, based on actual Part B services provided to

eligible children. Murphy said an average of 250 families, whose child has been found eligible for Part B services, refuse the service.

A discussion followed about the increasing social emotion needs of young children and the need for more behavioral health services for this population. Commissioner Bye noted that she is hearing from programs who say they cannot provide the level of service needed for some children who have experienced deep trauma. Bye also said she has concerns that some children are being served in segregated settings. Brinnel said it is not helpful to place children with high needs into one classroom. Brinnel said SDE is offering professional development opportunities to promote linkages between community preschools and LEAs. Elizabeth Teller said she is encouraged that OEC and SDE are working together, and noted that DCF should be a member of this working group.

Summer Months

The working group members discussed care for eligible children during the summer months when a child has turned 3 and no longer receiving Birth to Three services. When a child turns 3 in the spring months, some school districts start a first IEP and the child then receives services during the summer in an extended school year (ESY) program. Frequently, this is not the same team as in September. There is concern about lack of continuity of care for the child. Bryan Klimkiewicz said the ESY is not an optimal situation, because it is designed to maintain, not to make progress.

Commissioner Bye asked if there is a possibility of Birth to Three continuing services statewide until the start of the school year. Myra Watnick said, in some cases, Birth to Three continues services, receiving LEA reimbursement, during the summer months to ensure continuity of care.

Report from Break-out Groups

Three break-out groups discussed what they think should be included in the final report due January 1, 2020 to the General Assembly. Below is a summary of the topics raised by the three groups.

- Can the transition process from Part C to Part B services be improved through model practices?
- LEAs should track children who are found not eligible for Part B services.
- Build local resource capacity for children found not eligible for Part B services.
- Universal screens and check-in should be provided within school districts.
- Early care and education provider supports for screening, intervention and training are needed.
- For children found not eligible, parents should be provided with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire and a resource packet specific to the community services available. There should be three- and six-month follow-up with the family.
- Birth to Three services should be extended through the summer months for children turning 3 before school starts – as an option for families.
- How much are local school districts spending on ESY?
- Is a Birth to Five system a better and less costly option??
- The lack of universal pre-k greatly impacts the system and service delivery.

Commissioner Bye led the group in identifying the key questions coming out of the break-group discussions. The following was identified:

- 1) What is available to children when they turn age 3 and how are they served?
- 2) How can we observe/follow-up on children who are no longer eligible for services – is there a Child Find response? How are identifying children who need more support broadly?

- 3) Soften the age of transition at age 3 to allow for family option for continuity of care during late spring/early summer months.
- 4) What is the impact of not having universal pre-k?

Next Steps

- At the November meeting, the working group will craft an outline of the report.
- Superintendents will be surveyed about how much is being spent on summer month care (ESY)?
- Alice Ridgway will cost out the cost of Birth to Three providing summer care as a family option.

Future Meetings

The next meeting is November 26, 1 to 3 p.m., Room 1A, LOB.

Adjournment

The working group adjourned.