

# Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding

## MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 11, 2023

9:30 AM in Room 1C of the LOB and Zoom and YouTube Live

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 AM by Chairman, Andrew Feinstein.

The following task force members were present:

Feinstein, Andrew; Rabinowitz, Fran; Alessi, Sarel; Adler, Jason;  
Bowman, Alicia; Ditrio, Anthony; Flaherty, Tara; Gabrielson, Kathie;  
Grove, Mike; Helene, Karen; Hammersley, Lisa; Klimkiewicz, Bryan;  
Lussier, Jennifer; McCarthy, Patrice; Tartaglia, Heather; Wanzer, Stephanie;  
Yankee, Susan

Absent were:

Andrew Feinstein convened the meeting.

Andrew Feinstein welcomed the task force members to this first meeting and outlined the agenda for the day.

Andrew Feinstein provided opening remarks as the co-chair of the task force and introduced himself to members. He noted that he is the Legislative Chair of Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK).

Fran Rabinowitz provided opening remarks as the co-chair of the task force and introduced herself to members. She noted that she is the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS).

David Lenihan introduced himself to task force members and stated that he is standing in for Mike Grove and representing the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) for this meeting.

Heather Tartaglia introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the Chief Program Officer for the Capital Region Education Council (CREC). She also stated that she is representing the Regional Education Service Center (RESC) Alliance on the task force.

Bryan Klimkiewicz introduced himself to task force members. He noted that he is the Special Education Division Director at the State Department of Education (CSDE).

Stephanie Wanzer introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the Secretary of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA).

Susan Yankee introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the Chair of the State Advisory Council for Special Education and the parent of a special education student.

Jennifer Lussier introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is representing the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) and is a parent of two special education students.

Kathie Gabrielson introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the President of the Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education (ConnCASE).

Karen Helene introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the Director of the Benhaven School in Wallingford, CT and is representing approved private special education programs on the task force.

Lisa Hammersley introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the Executive Director of the School and State Finance Project.

Alicia Bowman introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is representing the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) on the task force.

Patrice McCarthy introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the Executive Director and General Counsel for the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE).

Tara Flaherty introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the parent of a special education student.

Sariel Alessi introduced herself to task force members. She noted that she is the parent of a special education student.

Jason Adler introduced himself to task force members. He noted that he is representing the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Connecticut.

Anthony Ditrio introduced himself to task force members. He noted that he is the Chair of the Connecticut Association of School Administrators (CASA).

Andrew Feinstein thanked task force members for their introductions. He stated that the next agenda item is assigning the task force members to the following workgroups:

- Finances
- Eligibility and Disproportionality
- Delivery and Effectiveness of Special Education Services

Andrew Feinstein noted that he and Fran Rabinowitz, as co-chairs of the task force, would assist each workgroup. He also stated that Bryan Klimkiewicz has offered CSDE staff support on all three workgroups. Finally, he asked task force members which workgroups they would like to be assigned to.

Each task force members expressed their respective interest in a workgroup.

Fran Rabinowitz announced the following task force member assignments:

- Finances
  - Patrice McCarthy (*chair*)
  - Jason Adler
  - Mike Grove
  - Lisa Hammersley
- Eligibility and Disproportionality
  - Kathie Gabrielson (*chair*)
  - Sariel Alessi
  - Jennifer Lussier
  - Stephanie Wanzer
  - Susan Yankee
- Delivery and Effectiveness of Special Education Services
  - Alicia Bowman (*chair*)
  - Anthony Ditrio
  - Tara Flaherty
  - Karen Helene
  - Heather Tartaglia

Fran Rabinowitz noted that the chair of each workgroup would be responsible for organizing their meetings and facilitating discussion to determine the recommendations of their workgroup. She also stated that workgroups should be meeting at least once between task force meetings. She asked the workgroup chairs to inform the task force co-chairs of their workgroup meeting times to ensure that one of them can attend.

Andrew Feinstein opened discussion, asking task force members for their general ideas on the priority areas that the task force should focus.

Heather Tartaglia expressed concerns regarding support for special education staff and the substitute qualifications for these staff.

Alicia Bowman emphasized the need for greater consistency and flexibility regarding special education staff qualification programs.

Kathie Gabrielson expressed concerns regarding equity of pay for paraprofessionals in the state.

Fran Rabinowitz asked for clarity regarding the alternative programs for special education certification at the state level.

Heather Tartaglia and Jason Adler provided brief explanations.

Bryan Klimkiewicz offered to send task force members an overview of what is currently in place regarding special education certification at the state level.

Andrew Feinstein noted that the State Department of Education would be providing the task force with a presentation at the next meeting regarding the current condition of special education in Connecticut.

Stephanie Wanzer expressed concerns that candidates in special education certification programs do not receive enough hands-on experience before entering the role.

Kathie Gabrielson expressed that CT-SEDS could be a strong resource for the state in a few years but that everyone is still learning right now.

Andrew Feinstein expressed that the task force may not want to focus on the implementation CT-SEDS because it could be in a very different situation by the time the final report is issued in February 2024.

Fran Rabinowitz echoed the previous comments by Andrew Feinstein regarding the topic of CT-SEDS.

David Lenihan proposed reaching out to colleges in the state to seek their ideas regarding special education certification programs and special education workforce development.

Andrew Feinstein expressed that speaking with the many relevant stakeholders relating to special education is up to the task force but noted the potentially large time commitment to do so.

Karen Helene suggested that conversations with these stakeholders could be had at the working group level, if necessary, rather than the larger task force.

Fran Rabinowitz emphasized the short time span of the task force.

Andrew Feinstein stated that data requests from CSDE should be considered and formalized as to not overwhelm the department.

Susan Yankee asked if there was a higher education representative on the task force.

Andrew Feinstein responded that task force representation is determined by statute, that could be amended by S.B. No. 1200. If the task force determines that higher education representation on the task force is necessary, they could potentially request the Education Committee to amend the bill as such.

Stephanie Wanzer expressed concerns regarding the large caseload of special education staff and suggested examining other states for ideas to improve support.

Fran Rabinowitz echoed the previous comments by Stephanie Wanzer regarding special education caseload.

Stephanie Wanzer expressed concerns regarding disparities between the special education staff shortages of different districts,

Fran Rabinowitz stated that she will survey superintendents regarding the number of special education openings in their respective districts so that the task force has that information available.

Karen Helene offered to help Fran Rabinowitz with the implementation of this survey.

Bryan Klimkiewicz suggested that the co-chairs and CSDE coordinate to determine how to address the topics required in statute for the task force to examine.

Andrew Feinstein asked task force members to provide their email addresses and cell phone numbers before leaving the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.